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THE ROMANCES OF ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

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Vol. VII.

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS.

Vol. II.

NEW HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE
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The Valois Romances.

MARGUERITE DE VALOIS.

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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MARGUERITE DE VALOIS.

CHAPTER I.

FRATERNITY.

In saving the life of Charles, Henri had done more than save the life of a man; he had prevented three kingdoms from changing sovereigns. Had Charles IX. been killed, the Duc d'Anjou would have been King of France, and the Duc d'Alençon most probably King of Poland. As to Navarre, as the Duc d'Anjou was enamoured of Madame de Condé, that crown would in all probability have paid the husband for the complaisance of his wife.

In all this change nothing beneficial would have arisen for Henri. He would have changed his master, that was all; and instead of Charles IX., who tolerated him, he would have seen the Duc d'Anjou on the throne, who, having but one head and one heart with his mother Catherine, had sworn his death, and would have kept his oath. These were the ideas that floated through his brain when the wild boar had rushed on King Charles, and we have seen the result of this reflection, rapid as lightning, that the life of Charles IX. was bound up with his own existence.

Charles IX., then, was saved by a devotion whose spring and action he could not comprehend. Marguerite, however, had comprehended it fully, and had admired the strange courage of Henri, which, like lightning, shone only in the storm.

Henri, as he returned from Bondy, reflected deeply on his situation, and when he reached the Louvre he had resolved on his plan of action. Without taking off his boots, but all dusty and covered with blood as he was, he went to the Duc d'Alençon, whom he found greatly agitated, and pacing hastily up and down his chamber. The prince started when he saw him.

"Yes," said Henri to him, taking both his hands, "I understand, my good brother; you are angry with me because I was the first to call the king's attention to the fact that your ball struck his horse's leg instead of hitting the boar, as you intended. But what could you expect? It was impossible to repress a word of surprise. Besides, the king himself must have perceived it, must he not?"

"Doubtless, doubtless!" muttered D'Alençon; "yet I cannot but attribute to a bad intention your pointing out this fact, which you must have seen has made my brother Charles suspicious of my purpose, and thrown a cloud between us."

"We will talk of this anon; and as to my good or bad intention, I have come now expressly to enable you to judge of it."

"Well," said D'Alençon, with his customary reserve, "speak, Henri; I will hear you."

"When I shall have spoken, François, you will see clearly of what sort are my intentions; for the confidence which I am about to repose in you excludes all reserve and caution, and when I shall have finished you can destroy me with a word."

"What is it, then?" said François, who began to be troubled.

"My brother, your interests are too dear to me to allow me to keep from you that the Huguenots have made me certain proposals."

"Proposals? what sort of proposals?"

"One of the leaders, M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale, son of the brave Mouy assassinated by Maurevel, has been with me at the risk of his life, to prove to me that I am in captivity."

"Ah, indeed! and what reply did you make?"

"My brother, you know how tenderly I love Charles, who saved my life; and that the queen-mother has been like my own mother to me. I have therefore refused all the offers he made me."

"And what were these offers?"

"The Huguenots wish to rehabilitate the throne of Navarre; and as in reality this throne belonged to me by inheritance, they offered it to me."

"Yes, and M. de Mouy, instead of the adhesion he had entreated, received your refusal?"

"Most decidedly; but since then —" continued Henri.

"You have repented, my brother?" interrupted D'Alençon.

"No; but I have found that M. de Mouy, enraged at my refusal, has cast his eyes in another direction."

"Whither?" asked François, quickly.

"I do not know; on the Prince de Condé, perchance."

"Very probably," was the reply.

"I have, however, a certain means of ascertaining the chief he has selected."

François became very pale.

"But," continued Henri, "the Huguenots are divided among themselves; and Mouy, brave and loyal as he is,

represents but one half the party. Now, the other half, which is not to be despised, has not lost all hope of seeing on the throne that Henri de Navarre who, having hesitated in the first instance, may have reflected since."

"Do you think so?"

"I have daily proofs of this. The troop that joined us at the hunt, — did you remark the men who composed it?"

"Yes; they were converted gentlemen."

"The chief of this troop, who made me a sign, — did you recognize him?"

"Yes; it was the Vicomte de Turenne."

"Did you understand what they wished?"

"Yes; they proposed to you to fly."

"Then," said Henri, "it is evident that there is a second party with different views from M. de Mouy, and that a very powerful one; so that in order to succeed it is requisite to unite the two parties, Turenne and Mouy. The conspiracy strengthens; troops are ready; they await only the signal from me. Now, in that critical situation, which requires on my part prompt action, I am debating in my mind two purposes, between which I hesitate. I have come to submit these plans to you as to a friend."

"Say rather, as a brother!"

"First let me expose the state of my mind, my dear François. I have no desire, no ambition, no capacity. I am a commonplace country gentleman, — poor, indolent, and timid. The rôle of conspirator presents to me a chance of disgrace, badly compensated by even the assurance of attaining to a crown."

"Ah, my brother!" said François, "you do yourself injustice; nothing can be more pitiable than the position of a prince whose fortune is limited by a landmark, or by some individual in the career of honor. I cannot therefore credit what you say."

"Yet I speak only the truth, my brother," was Henri's reply. "And if I could believe that I had a real friend, I would resign in his favor all the power which the party attached to me would confer; but," he added with a sigh, "I have not such a friend."

"Perhaps you are mistaken."

"No, *ventre-saint-gris!*" cried Henri. "Except yourself, Brother, I see no one who is attached to me; and then, rather than see a movement miscarry amid frightful commotions, because in the interest of some one who is unworthy, I prefer to inform my brother the king of all that is going on. I will name no person, I will not mention country or date; but I will prevent the catastrophe."

"Great God!" exclaimed D'Alençon, who could not repress his alarm; "what are you saying? What! you, the sole hope of the party since the admiral's death; you, a converted Huguenot, — scarce converted, it would seem, — would you raise the knife against your brothers? Henri, Henri, in doing that you will hand over to a second Saint Bartholomew all the Calvinists of the kingdom! Do you know that Catherine only awaits such an opportunity to exterminate all the survivors?" And the trembling duke, his face marked with red and livid spots, pressed Henri's hand, in his eagerness to make him promise to renounce a resolution which must destroy him.

"What!" said Henri, with an air of much surprise, "do you think, François, that so many misfortunes must then occur? Yet it seems to me that with the king's guarantee I could save the imprudent partisans."

"The guarantee of King Charles IX., Henri? Did not the admiral have it, — Téligny, yourself? Ah, Henri! I tell you, if you do this, you destroy them all, — not only them, but also all directly or indirectly connected with them."

Henri appeared to reflect for a moment. "If," he said, "I were an important prince at court, I should act otherwise; in your place, for instance, François, a son of France, and probable heir to the throne — "

François shook his head ironically and said, "What would you do in my place?"

"In your place, my brother," replied Henri, "I should put myself at the head of this movement. My name and credit would answer to my conscience for the life of the seditious; and I would derive from it something useful for myself in the first instance, and then for the king; and this from an enterprise which otherwise may terminate in great mischief for France."

D'Alençon listened to these words with a joy which expanded all the muscles of his face, and replied, "Do you think this practicable, and that it will avoid all those evils which you foresee?"

"I do," said Henri. "The Huguenots like you; your modest exterior, your situation, elevated and interesting at the same time, and the kindness you have always evinced to those of the Reformed faith, induce them to serve you."

"But," said D'Alençon, "there is a schism in the party; will those who are for you be for me?"

"I will undertake to conciliate them on two grounds."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, through the confidence which the chiefs have in me; then, through their fear that your Highness, knowing their names — "

"But those names, who will give them to me?"

"I will, *ventre-saint-gris!*"

"You will do that?"

"Listen, François; I have told you that in this court I love only you. That comes, doubtless, from the fact

that you are persecuted like myself. And then my wife also loves you with an affection that has no parallel."

François blushed with pleasure.

"Believe me, my brother," continued Henri; "take up this matter. Reign in Navarre; and if you keep for me a place at your table and a good forest for hunting, I shall be perfectly happy."

"Reign in Navarre!" said the duke; "but if—"

"If the Duc d'Anjou is named King of Poland, you would say?"

François looked at Henri with some alarm.

"Well, listen," said Henri, —"since nothing escapes your observation; it is precisely on that supposition that I have reasoned. If the Duc d'Anjou is nominated King of Poland, and our brother Charles (whom God preserve!) should die, it is but two hundred leagues from Pau to Paris, while it is four hundred from Paris to Cracow; and you would be here to claim the inheritance at the moment when the King of Poland would only have learned of its being vacated. Then, if you are satisfied with me, François, you may give me this kingdom of Navarre, which will then be only one of the offshoots of your crown. Under these circumstances I would accept it. The worst that could happen to you would be to remain king down there starting a royal branch, and living *en famille* with me and my wife; while here, what are you? A poor, persecuted prince, a poor third son of the king, a slave of two elder brothers, whom a caprice may send to the Bastille."

"Yes, yes," said François. "I feel all this so deeply that I cannot understand how you renounce all the hopes that you propose for me. Nothing beats there, then?" and the Duc d'Alençon placed his hand on his brother's heart.

"There are," said Henri, with a smile, "burdens too heavy for certain hands. I shall not try to lift this one. Fear of the fatigue annuls the desire of possession."

"Then, Henri, you really renounce?"

"I said so to Mouy, and I repeat it to you."

"But in such cases, Brother," said D'Alençon, "men do not say, they prove."

Henri drew a long breath, like a wrestler who perceives the strength of his adversary giving way. "I will give you proof," he said, "this evening. At nine o'clock the list of the chiefs and the plan of the enterprise shall be in your hands. I have already sent to Mouy a formal renunciation."

François took Henri's hand, and pressed it with fervor. At the same moment Catherine entered the apartment, and, as usual, without being announced. "Together!" she said with a smile, "like two loving brothers!"

"I hope so, Madame," replied Henri, with the utmost composure, while the Duc d'Alençon turned pale with agony. He then withdrew a few steps, leaving Catherine free to talk with her son.

The queen-mother then took from her purse a magnificent jewel, and said to François, "This clasp comes from Florence, and I give it you to put on your sword-belt." Then she added in a low voice, "If you should hear any noise this evening in the apartments of your good brother Henri, do not heed it."

François grasped his mother's hand and said, "Will you allow me to show him the handsome present you have just made me?"

"Do still better; give it to him in your own and my name, for I had ordered a second for that purpose."

"Do you hear, Henri?" said François; "my good

mother brings me this jewel, and redoubles its value by allowing me to offer it to you."

Henri went into raptures at the beauty of the jewel, and was profuse in his thanks.

"My son," said Catherine, "I do not feel well, and am going to bed. Your brother Charles is much shaken by his fall, and wishes to do the same thing. We shall not, therefore, all sup together. Ah, Henri! I forgot to compliment you on your courage and skill; you have saved your king and brother, and you must be recompensed for such high service."

"I am recompensed already," replied Henri, with a bow.

"By the feeling that you have done your duty?" was Catherine's reply; "but that is not enough for Charles and myself, and we must devise some means of requiting our obligations towards you."

"All that may come from you and my good brother must be welcome, Madame," was Henri's reply; and bowing, he left the apartment.

"Ah, my worthy brother François!" thought Henri, as he went out; "now I am sure not to go away alone; and the conspiracy, which had a heart, has now found a head, and what is still better, this head is responsible to me for my own. Only let us be on our guard. Catherine has made me a present; Catherine promises me a recompense. There is some deviltry brewing; I will have a conversation this evening with Marguerite."

CHAPTER II.

THE GRATITUDE OF KING CHARLES IX.

Maurevel had remained for a portion of the day in the king's armory; and when Catherine saw the moment approach of the return from the chase, she had desired him and his satellites to pass into her oratory. Charles IX., informed by his nurse on his arrival who the man was, and remembering the order his mother had extracted from him in the morning, understood everything.

"Ah, ah!" he murmured, "the time is ill-chosen, — on the very day on which he has saved my life." And he was about to go to his mother, but suddenly changed his intention.

"*Mordieu!*" he exclaimed, "if I speak to her of it, what a discussion will ensue! We had better act each independently. Nurse," he continued, "shut all the doors, and inform the Queen Elizabeth [Charles IX. was married to Elizabeth of Austria, daughter of Maximilian] that being rather unwell from my fall, I shall sleep alone to-night."

The nurse obeyed; and as the hour for his plan had not arrived, Charles began to write verses. It was the occupation in which his time passed most rapidly; and thus nine o'clock struck when Charles thought it was only seven. He counted the strokes one after the other, and at the last he rose. "Devil's name!" he exclaimed, "it is precisely the time."

Taking his cloak and hat, he went out by a secret door

which he had made in the panelling, and of the existence of which Catherine herself was ignorant.

He went straight to Henri's apartments. Henri had gone thither only to change his dress when he left the Duc d'Alencon, and had then left it immediately.

"He must have gone to sup with Marguerite," said the king to himself; "he seemed to be on the best possible terms with her to-day;" and he went towards Marguerite's apartments.

Marguerite had invited to her rooms the Duchesse de Nevers, Coconnas, and La Mole, and they were enjoying a repast of pastry and confectionery.

Charles knocked at the door. Gillonne went to open it, and was so frightened at the sight of the king that she could scarcely make her obeisance to him; and instead of running to inform her mistress of the august visit which was paid her, she allowed Charles to pass her without any other signal than the cry she had uttered. The king crossed the antechamber, and guided by the shouts of laughter, advanced towards the dining-room.

"Poor Henriot!" he ejaculated, "he is making merry, quite unconscious of his danger."

"'T is I!" he said, raising the tapestry, and presenting a smiling face.

Marguerite uttered a terrible cry. All joyous as was the king's face, it produced on her the effect of a Medusa's head. Sitting face to the *portière*, she had recognized Charles. The two men had their backs turned to the king.

"His Majesty!" she exclaimed in a tone of affright; and she rose from her seat.

Coconnas, while the three others felt quite bewildered, was the only one who preserved his presence of mind. He also rose, but with well-contrived awkwardness upset the

table, with its glass, plate, and wax lights; instantly there was complete darkness and the silence of death.

"Steal off!" said Coconnas to La Mole; "quick, quick, and cleverly!"

La Mole did not wait for a second hint, but feeling along the wall with his hands, groped his way into the bedchamber, that he might hide in the cabinet which he knew so well. But as he entered the sleeping-room he came in contact with a man who entered by the secret passage.

"What can all this mean?" said Charles, in the dark, with a voice that was beginning to sound very impatiently. "Am I an intruder, that on my appearance such a scene of confusion takes place? Henriot! Henriot! where are you? Answer me!"

"We are saved!" whispered Marguerite, taking a hand which she supposed to be that of Coconnas; "the king thinks that my husband is one of the guests."

"And he shall think so still, Madame, be assured," said Henri to the queen in the same tone.

"Great God!" exclaimed Marguerite, suddenly dropping the hand she held, which was that of the King of Navarre.

"Hush!" said Henri.

"Thousand names of the devil! what are you all whispering for?" cried Charles. "Henri, answer; where are you?"

"I am here, Sire," said the voice of the King of Navarre.

"The devil!" said Coconnas, who was with the Duchesse de Nevers in a corner; "the plot thickens."

"And we are doubly lost," added the Duchesse de Nevers.

Coconnas, brave even to rashness, had reflected that at last the candles must be lighted, and thinking the sooner

the better, abandoned the hand of the Duchesse de Nevers, which he had hitherto held in his own, picked up a taper, and going to the stove, lighted it. The room was thus again illuminated, and Charles cast an inquiring glance around.

Henri was close to his wife; the Duchesse de Nevers was alone in a corner; and Coconnas, standing in the middle of the chamber with his candle in his hand, lighted up the whole scene.

"Excuse us, Brother," said Marguerite; "we did not expect you."

"And so your Majesty, as you may see, has frightened us not a little," said Henriette.

"For my part," added Henri, who at once comprehended the whole, "I was so startled that in rising I upset the table."

Coconnas gave the King of Navarre a look which implied, "I like that! here's a husband who understands at half a word."

"What a terrible confusion!" said Charles. "Henriot, your supper is upset; so come with me, and you shall finish it elsewhere. I mean to carry you off this evening."

"What, Sire!" said Henri; "your Majesty will do me that honor?"

"Yes, my Majesty will do you the honor to take you from the Louvre. Lend him to me, Marguerite, and I will bring him back again to-morrow morning."

"Ah, Brother," replied Marguerite, "you have no need of my permission for that; you are master here, as everywhere else."

"Sire," said Henri, "I will just go for another cloak, and return immediately."

"There's no occasion; the one you have on is quite good enough."

"But, Sire —" said the Béarnais.

"I tell you not to return to your apartments; thousand names of a devil! don't you hear what I say? Come along!"

"Yes, yes, go!" said Marguerite, pressing her husband's arm, for a singular look of Charles's had convinced her that something remarkable was going on.

"I am ready, Sire," said Henri.

But Charles was looking very steadfastly at Coconnas, who continued his office of torch-bearer by lighting the other candles.

"Who is this gentleman?" he inquired of Henri, still looking at the Piedmontese. "Is it M. de la Mole?"

"Who has mentioned M. de la Mole to him?" thought Marguerite.

"No, Sire," replied Henri; "M. de la Mole is not here, and I regret it the more, as I cannot have the honor of presenting him to your Majesty as well as his friend, M. de Coconnas. They are inseparable, and are both in the suite of M. d'Alençon."

"Ah, ah! of our famous marksman?" said Charles. Then frowning, he added, "Is not M. de la Mole a Huguenot?"

"Converted, Sire," said Henri; "and I answer for him as for myself."

"When you answer for any one, Henriot, after what you have done to-day, I have no right to doubt you. But no matter. I should have liked to see M. de la Mole, but some other time will do;" and then, looking again around the chamber, Charles kissed Marguerite, and took away the King of Navarre, holding him by the arm. At the gate of the Louvre, Henri stopped to speak to some one.

"Come, come along quickly, Henriot," said Charles.

"When I tell you the air of the Louvre is not good for you this evening, why the devil don't you believe me?"

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" murmured Henri, "and Mouy will be all alone in my room; if the air is not good for me, it must be worse for him."

"Well," said the king, when he and Henri had crossed the drawbridge, "it is all arranged, then, Henriot, that the gentlemen of M. le Duc d'Alençon shall pay court to your wife?"

"How is that, Sire?"

"Yes, is not that M. de Coconnas paying attentions to Margot?"

"Who has told you that?"

"No matter," replied the king; "some one has told me."

"A hoax, pure and simple, Sire. M. de Coconnas, it is true, has a tenderness for some one, but it is for Madame de Nevers."

"Ah, bah!"

"I can assure your Majesty that it is as I say."

Charles broke out into loud laughter. "Very well," said he; "if the Duc de Guise gives me an opportunity I will relate to him the exploits of his sister-in-law. After all," he continued, meditating, "I don't know whether it was M. de Coconnas or M. de la Mole who was mentioned to me."

"Neither the one nor the other, Sire," said Henri. "I can answer to you for the sentiments of my wife."

"Good, Henriot, good!" said the king. "I would rather find you in this mood than in any other. Upon my honor, you are a brave lad, and I think that presently I shall be unable to get along without you."

On saying these words the king gave a peculiar whistle, and four gentlemen who were waiting in the Rue de

Beauvais joined them, and they all advanced into the city as the clock struck ten.

"Well!" said Marguerite, when the king and Henri had gone, "let us sit down again to table."

"No, faith!" said the duchess; "I am too much frightened. The little house in the Rue Cloche Percée forever! No one can enter there without laying a regular siege; and our brave friends could use their swords. But what are you looking for, M. de Coconnas, under the tables and in the closets?"

"I am looking for my friend La Mole," said the Piedmontese.

"Search in the direction of my chamber, Monsieur," said Marguerite. "There is a certain cabinet there — "

"Good!" said Coconnas, "I will go there;" and he went into the chamber.

"Well!" said a voice in the darkness, "where are we?"

"Eh, *mordi!* we are now at the dessert."

"And the King of Navarre?"

"Has seen nothing. As a husband he is perfect; I wish my wife might have one like him. But I fear it would have to be by a second marriage."

"And King Charles?"

"Ah, the king has taken off the husband."

"No, really?"

"Yes, and the ladies have a pilgrimage to make towards the Rue du Roi de Sicile, and we must guard the pilgrims."

"Impossible! you know that — "

"Why impossible?"

"Why, then, are we not in the service of his royal Highness?"

The two friends represented their position to their fair

companions, and Madame de Nevers said, "Well, then, we will go without you."

"And may we know where you are going?" asked Coconnas.

"Oh, you are too inquisitive," said the duchess. "Quære, et invenies." ("Seek, and you will find.")

The two young men made their bows, and proceeded to the Duc d'Alençon, who seemed to be awaiting them.

"You are rather late, gentlemen," was his remark.

"Scarcely ten o'clock, Monseigneur," replied Coconnas.

The duke looked at his watch. "True," he said, "but yet everybody in the Louvre is in bed."

"Monseigneur," said Coconnas, "your Highness no doubt will go to bed, or write — "

"No, gentlemen, I can dispense with your services until to-morrow morning."

"Come, come," whispered Coconnas to La Mole; "the court sleeps out of bed this evening, it seems. The night will be devilishly fine. Let us take our share of it."

The two young men ran upstairs as speedily as possible, took their cloaks and night-swords, and hastening out of the Louvre, overtook the two ladies at the corner of the Rue du Coq St. Honoré.

Meantime the Duc d'Alençon, shut up in his chamber, waited, with eyes open and ears on the alert, the events which his mother had promised.

CHAPTER III.

MAN PROPOSES, BUT GOD DISPOSES.

As the duke had said to the young men, the most profound silence reigned throughout the Louvre. Marguerite and Madame de Nevers had gone to the Rue Tizon; Coconnas and La Mole had followed them; the king and Henri were roving about in the city; the Duc d'Alençon was anxiously awaiting the occurrence of the events his mother had alluded to; and Catherine was in bed, listening to Madame de Sauve, who read to her certain Italian tales, at which the worthy queen laughed heartily.

Catherine had not been in so good spirits for a long time. After partaking with good appetite of a collation with her attendants, she had held a conference with her physician, had gone over the daily household accounts, and then had ordered a service of prayer for the success of a certain enterprise which she said was important to the happiness of her children. It was a habit of Catherine — a habit quite Florentine — to have prayers and masses said, of which none but God and herself knew the purpose. Then she had revisited René, and had selected several novelties from his rich assortment.

"Let some one ascertain," said Catherine, "if my daughter, the Queen of Navarre, is in her apartments, and if she is, beg her to come and keep me company."

The page to whom this order was addressed left the room, and soon returned, accompanied by Gillonne.

"I sent for the queen," said Catherine, "not for her attendant."

"Madame," replied Gillonne, "I thought it my duty to come myself to inform your Majesty that the Queen of Navarre is gone out with the Duchesse de Nevers."

"Out at this hour!" said Catherine, frowning; "where is she gone?"

"To a meeting of alchemists, at the Hôtel de Guise, in the apartments of Madame de Nevers."

"And when will she return?"

"The meeting will not break up until very late," replied Gillonne, "so that it is probable her Majesty will sleep at the Hôtel de Guise."

"She is very happy," murmured Catherine. "She has friends, and is a queen; she wears a crown and is called your Majesty, and she has no subjects; she is very fortunate."

After that sally, which made her hearers smile inwardly, "Besides," she murmured, "since she has gone out, — for she has gone out, you say?"

"Half an hour ago, Madame."

"So much the better; go."

Gillonne saluted, and left the room.

"Go on, Charlotte," said the queen.

Madame de Sauve obeyed. In ten minutes Catherine stopped her. "Oh, by the way," said she, "dismiss the guards in the gallery."

This was the signal agreed upon with Maurevel. The order was executed, and Madame de Sauve continued. She had read for a quarter of an hour, when a long and piercing cry was heard, that made the hair of all in the chamber stand on end. A pistol-shot followed.

"Well," said Catherine, "why do you not go on reading?"

"Madame," replied Charlotte, turning pale, "did not your Majesty hear?"

"What?" asked Catherine.

"That cry!"

"And that pistol-shot?" added the captain of the guards.

"A cry and a pistol-shot!" said Catherine. "I heard nothing; besides, a cry and a pistol-shot are not so very extraordinary at the Louvre. Read on, Carlotta."

"But listen, Madame," said Madame de Sauve, while M. de Nancey stood grasping his sword-hilt, not daring to leave the apartment without the queen's permission; "I hear struggling, imprecations — "

"Shall I go and see, Madame?" asked Nancey.

"No, Monsieur," returned Catherine. "Who will be here to protect me in case of danger? It is only some drunken Swiss quarrelling."

The tranquillity of the queen contrasted so strangely with the alarm of every one else that Madame de Sauve, timid as she was, fixed her eyes inquiringly on her. "But, Madame," said she, "it is as if they were killing some one."

"Whom do you think they are killing?"

"The King of Navarre, Madame; for the noise comes from the direction of his apartments."

"The fool!" murmured the queen, whose lips, spite of the control she had over herself, were strangely agitated, for she was muttering a prayer, — "the fool! she sees her King of Navarre everywhere."

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" said Madame de Sauve, sinking into her chair.

"It is over," said Catherine. "Captain," continued she, addressing M. de Nancey, "I hope that to-morrow you will inquire into this, and punish the culprits se-

verely. Continue, Carlotta." And Catherine sank back on her pillow in a state that seemed near akin to fainting, for her attendants remarked large drops of perspiration on her face.

Madame de Sauve obeyed; but her eyes and her voice alone were engaged. She fancied she saw him most dear to her surrounded by deadly perils; and after a mental struggle of some minutes, her voice failed her, the book fell from her hands, and she fainted.

Suddenly a still more violent noise than before was heard, a hasty step shook the corridor, two more pistol-shots made the window-panes shake. Catherine, astonished at this renewal of the strife, rose; she was deadly pale, her eyes were dilated, and at the moment Nancey was about to rush from the apartment she seized his arm, saying, "Let every one stay here; I will go myself and see what is the matter."

Thus it was: Mouy had received that morning from the hands of Orthon the key of Henri's chamber; in the key he remarked a small roll of paper, which he took out and found it to contain the pass-word at the Louvre for the night. Orthon had moreover given him the king's directions to be at the Louvre at ten o'clock. At half-past nine Mouy had put on his armor, buttoned a silken doublet on it, buckled on his sword, placed his pistols in his belt, and covered all with the famous cherry mantle.

We have seen how Henri thought fit to pay Marguerite a visit before entering his own apartments, and how he arrived by the secret passage just in time to run against La Mole in Marguerite's chamber and to take his place in the supper-room. Precisely at this moment Mouy passed the wicket of the Louvre, and thanks to the pass-word and the cherry mantle, entered the palace without obsta-

cle. He went straight to the King of Navarre's apartments, imitating, as well as he could, La Mole's walk and manner. He found Orthon waiting for him in the antechamber.

"M. de Mouy," said the mountaineer, "the king has gone out, but he has ordered me to conduct you to his chamber, where you are to wait; should he not come until late, he desires you will lie down on his bed."

Mouy entered, without asking further explanation. In order to fill up the time he took pen and paper, and approaching an excellent map of France that hung on the wall, set himself to count the stages from Paris to Pau. This did not occupy him long, and when he had finished he was at a loss what to do. He walked up and down the room a few times, yawned, and then, profiting by Henri's invitation, and justified too by the familiarity that then existed between princes and their gentlemen, he placed his pistols and the lamp on the table, laid his drawn sword by his side, and secure against surprise, for an attendant was watching in the outer chamber, soon slept soundly. Mouy snored like a trooper, and in that respect could rival the King of Navarre himself.

It was then that six men, sword and dagger in hand, glided noiselessly along the corridor that communicated with Henri's apartments. One of these men walked in front; besides his sword and dagger, he had pistols attached to his belt by silver hooks. This man was Maurevel. Arrived at Henri's door, he stopped.

"Are you quite sure all the sentinels of the corridor have gone?" he asked.

"There is not one at his post," replied his lieutenant.

"Good," said Maurevel; "now let us see whether he whom we come for is here."

"But," said the lieutenant, arresting the hand which

Maurevel was placing on the door-knob, "Captain, these are the King of Navarre's apartments."

"Who said anything to the contrary?" replied Maurevel.

The men looked at one another with an air of surprise, and the lieutenant recoiled a step. "What!" said he, "are we to make an arrest at this hour in the Louvre, and in the apartments of the King of Navarre?"

"What would you say," replied Maurevel, "if I should tell you that he whom you are about to arrest is the King of Navarre himself?"

"I should say, Captain, that it is a serious matter, and that without an order signed by the king—"

"Read," said Maurevel; and taking from his doublet the order given him by Queen Catherine, he handed it to the lieutenant.

"All right," said the latter, after reading it. "I have nothing more to say."

"And are you ready?"

"I am."

"And you?" continued Maurevel, turning to the five others.

They saluted respectfully.

"Listen to me, then, gentlemen," said Maurevel; "this is the plan: Two of you will remain at this door, two at the door of the bedchamber, and two will go in with me."

"And then?" said the lieutenant.

"Listen well to this: we are commanded to prevent the prisoner from calling, crying out, or resisting; any breach of that order is to be punished with death."

"Come, come, he has *carte blanche*," said the lieutenant to the man appointed with him to go in with Maurevel to the king.

"Complete," said Maurevel.

"Poor devil of a king!" said one of the men; "it was written on high that he should not escape."

"And here also," said Maurevel, taking from the lieutenant Catherine's order, which he returned to his doublet.

Maurevel placed the key Catherine had given him in the lock, and leaving two men at the outer door, passed with the four others into the antechamber.

"Ah," said he, hearing even from that distance the loud breathing of the sleeper; "it appears that we shall find here the man we are looking for."

Orthon, thinking it was his master returning, advanced, and found himself in the presence of five armed men. At the sight of their sinister faces, and more particularly at that of Maurevel, who was called "the King's Killer," he recoiled, and planted himself before the second door.

"Who are you?" said Orthon; "and what do you want?"

"In the king's name," said Maurevel, "where is your master?"

"He is absent."

"It is false!" replied Maurevel. "Stand back."

Orthon seized the handle of the door.

"You shall not enter!" cried he.

At a sign from Maurevel the four men grasped the faithful page, tore him from his hold, and as he was about to cry out, Maurevel placed his hand on his mouth. Orthon bit the assassin furiously, who uttered a suppressed cry and struck him on the head with the pommel of his sword. Orthon fell, crying, "Treason! treason!" His voice failed him and he fainted. The assassins passed over his body; two stationed themselves at the second door, and the two others, led by Maurevel, entered the

bedchamber. By the light of the lamp they saw the bed; the curtains were closed.

"Oh," said the lieutenant, "he snores no longer!"

"Now, then, upon him!" cried Maurevel.

At this voice a hoarse cry more like the roar of a lion than the voice of a human being was heard; the curtains were violently drawn back; and a man in a cuirass and steel cap appeared, sitting on the bed, a pistol in each hand, and his drawn sword on his knees. When Maurevel saw that face and recognized Mouy, his hair stood on end; he turned deadly pale, and recoiled as if he had seen a spectre.

Suddenly the armed figure rose and advanced towards Maurevel as he started back, so that the threatener seemed to retreat, and the threatened to pursue.

"Ah, scoundrel!" said Mouy; "you have come to murder me, as you murdered my father!"

The two guards who were with Maurevel alone heard these terrible words; but as they were uttered, one of Mouy's pistols was levelled at Maurevel's head. The ruffian sank on his knees at the instant Mouy pulled the trigger, and one of the guards, whom he uncovered by this movement, fell with a bullet in his heart; Maurevel instantly fired in return, but the ball glanced off Mouy's cuirass.

Then, measuring the distance and calculating his spring, Mouy, with a back stroke of his large sword, cleft the skull of the second guard, and turning to Maurevel, crossed weapons with him. The combat was terrible, but brief. At the fourth pass Maurevel felt Mouy's sword in his throat; he uttered a low groan and fell, upsetting the lamp, which was extinguished in the fall.

Agile and powerful as one of Homer's heroes, Mouy sprang boldly forward, favored by the obscurity, into the antechamber, felled one of the guards, sent the other

staggering from him, passed like lightning between the two at the outer door, escaped two pistol-shots fired at him, the balls of which grazed the wall of the corridor, and was then safe, for besides the sword with which he had dealt such fearful blows, he had one pistol still loaded. He hesitated an instant whether he should enter D'Alençon's apartments, the door of which seemed ajar, or escape from the Louvre. Resolving upon the latter course, he sprang down the stairs, arrived at the wicket, pronounced the pass-word, and darted out, crying, "Go upstairs! they are killing on the king's account." Availing himself of the stupefaction produced by the report of the pistols and by his own words, he disappeared in the Rue du Coq, without having received a scratch.

It was at this moment that Catherine stopped M. de Nancey, saying, "Let every one stay here; I will go myself and see what is the matter."

"But, Madame," said the captain, "the danger to which your Majesty is exposed compels me to follow."

"Stay, Monsieur!" said Catherine, in a tone more imperious than before; "stay! Around the paths of kings there is a protection more powerful than the sword of man."

The captain remained. Then, taking a lamp, and passing her naked feet into slippers, Catherine advanced, impassive and cold as a spectre, along the corridor, still full of smoke, towards Henri's apartments. She arrived at the first door, entered, and found Orthon senseless on the threshold.

"Oh," said she, "here is the servant; we shall soon find the master;" and she approached the second door. There her foot struck against a corpse; she turned the light upon it. It was the guard whose skull had been cleft; he was quite dead. A little beyond lay the lieutenant, with the death-rattle in his throat. Beside the bed was a

man, who, pale as death, was bleeding fast from a double wound in his throat, and who, clinching his hands convulsively, strove to raise himself. It was Maurevel.

Catherine shuddered; she saw the bed deserted. She looked round the room, and in vain sought among the three men lying there in their blood for the corpse which she hoped to see.

Maurevel recognized Catherine; his eyes dilated horribly, and he stretched out his hand towards her with a gesture of despair.

"Well," said she, in suppressed tones; "where is he? What has become of him? Wretch, have you allowed him to escape?"

Maurevel strove to speak, but an unintelligible whistling sound came from his wound, a bloody foam covered his lips, and he shook his head to indicate his inability and his suffering.

"Speak!" cried the queen; "speak, if it be but one word!"

Maurevel pointed to his wound, and after a desperate effort to utter something, fainted.

Catherine looked around her; there were none but the dead and the dying there; blood flowed in every direction, and silence reigned in the chamber. She spoke again to Maurevel, but in vain; a paper had dropped from his doublet, — it was the order for Henri's arrest. Catherine seized it, and concealed it beneath her robe. At this moment she heard a slight noise behind her, and turning round, she perceived D'Alençon, who had been drawn thither by the noise.

"You here, François?" said she.

"Yes, Madame. For God's sake, what does this mean?"

"Retire to your apartments; you will know soon enough."

D'Alençon, however, was not so ignorant of what had occurred as Catherine imagined. On hearing steps in the corridor he had listened. Seeing men enter the King of Navarre's apartments, he had recalled the words of Catherine, had understood what was to happen, and was secretly rejoiced at having so dangerous a friend disposed of by a hand more powerful than his own.

Soon the noise of fire-arms and the steps of a fugitive attracted his attention, and he had seen, as it was disappearing, a red mantle, too familiar to him not to be recognized.

"Mouy!" cried he; "Mouy with my brother-in-law! But no, it is impossible! Can it be La Mole?"

He began to feel alarmed. He remembered that the young man had been recommended to him by Marguerite herself. Wishing to assure himself, he ascended to the chamber of the two young men; no one was there, but the cherry-colored mantle was hanging against the wall. It was, then, Mouy. Pale as death, and trembling lest Mouy had been taken prisoner and would betray the secrets of the conspiracy, he rushed to the wicket, where he was informed that the man in the red mantle had escaped safe and sound, saying that some one was being killed on the king's account.

"He was mistaken," muttered D'Alençon; "it is on the queen-mother's account." And returning to the scene of combat, he found Catherine prowling like a hyena among the dead. On the command given him by his mother he returned to his rooms, affecting a quiet obedience notwithstanding the tumultuous ideas that agitated his mind.

Catherine, in despair at the failure of this new attempt, called Nancey, had the bodies removed and Maurevel conveyed to his own house, and forbade them to wake the the king.

"Oh," she murmured, as she entered her apartments, her head sinking on her bosom, "he has again escaped; the hand of God protects him. He will reign; he will reign!"

Then, as she opened her door, she assumed a smile.

"Oh, Madame, what was the matter?" exclaimed all but Madame de Sauve, who was too frightened to ask any questions.

"Oh, nothing," replied the queen; "only a noise, — nothing more."

"Oh!" cried Madame de Sauve, suddenly, pointing with her finger. "Your Majesty says it is nothing, and at every step leaves a track on the carpet!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE TWO KINGS.

Charles IX. walked arm in arm with Henri, followed by his four gentlemen, and preceded by two torch-bearers.

"When I go out from the Louvre," said the poor king, "I experience a pleasure like that I feel when I enter a fine forest, — I breathe, I live, I am free!"

Henri smiled. "Your Majesty would be happy in my mountains in Béarn, then?" was his reply.

"Yes, and I can understand how desirous you are to return there; but if the desire comes very strong upon you, Henriot," added Charles, laughing, "be careful, for my mother Catherine is so very fond of you that she really cannot do without you."

"What does your Majesty propose to do this evening?" said Henri, giving a new direction to that dangerous conversation.

"I wish to introduce you to some one, Henriot; you will give me your opinion."

"I am at your Majesty's orders."

"To the right! to the right! we will go to the Rue des Barres."

The two kings, followed by their escort, had reached the Hôtel de Condé, when they observed two men, wrapped in long cloaks, come forth from a private door, which one of them closed carefully.

"Oh, oh!" said the king to Henri, who, according

to his custom, looked also, but without speaking, "this deserves our attention."

"Why do you say that, Sire?" asked the King of Navarre.

"It is not on your account, Henriot. You are sure of your wife," he added with a smile, "but your cousin Condé is not so sure of his; or if he is sure, devil take me! he is wrong."

"But how do you know, Sire, that it is Madame de Condé these gentlemen have come to visit?"

"A presentiment. They have seen us and try to avoid notice, and then the peculiar cut of one of their mantles. *Pardieu!* it would be strange!"

"What?"

"Nothing, — only an idea that occurred to me; but let us advance towards them." And he went towards the two men, who, thus seeing that they must be accosted, made several steps in a contrary direction.

"Holloa, Messieurs!" said the king; "stop!"

"Do you address us?" said a voice which made Charles and his companion start.

"Ah, Henriot!" said Charles, "do you recognize that voice now?"

"Sire," replied Henri, "if your brother, the Duc d'Anjou, were not at Rochelle, I would swear it was he who just spoke."

"Well, then," said Charles, "he is not at Rochelle, that is all."

"But who is with him?"

"You do not recognize his companion?"

"No, Sire."

"He is, nevertheless, a man whose figure can hardly be mistaken. Holloa! I say," continued the king, "did you not hear me?"

"Are you the watch, to apprehend us?" asked the taller of the two men, freeing his arm from the folds of his mantle.

"Assume that we are the watch," said the king, "and stand when you are desired." Then, whispering to Henri, he added, "Now you will see the volcano spit forth flames."

"There are eight of you," replied the taller of the two men, showing not only his arm but his face; "but were you a hundred, I bid you keep your distance."

"Ah, ah! the Duc de Guise!" said Henri.

"Ah! our cousin of Lorraine!" said the king; "it is you, is it? How fortunate!"

"The king!" exclaimed the duke.

As to the other personage, he wrapped himself up still closer in his mantle, and remained motionless, after having first uncovered his head respectfully.

"Sire," said the Duc de Guise, "I have just been paying a visit to my sister-in-law, Madame de Condé."

"Yes, and have brought one of your gentlemen with you. Who is he?"

"Sire," replied the duke, "your Majesty does not know him."

"Then we will make his acquaintance now," said the king; and going towards him, he desired the two men to approach with their torches.

"Pardon, my brother!" said the Duc d'Anjou, opening his mantle, and bowing with ill-concealed vexation.

"Ah, ah, Henri! What, is it you? But no, it cannot be possible; I am mistaken. My brother of Anjou would never have gone to see any one before coming to see me. He is not ignorant that for princes of the blood there is only one entrance in Paris, and that is by the gate of the Louvre."

"Pardon me, Sire," said the Duc d'Anjou. "I entreat your Majesty to forgive this breach of etiquette."

"Of course," replied the king, in a jeering tone; "and what were you doing, Brother, at the Hôtel de Condé?"

"Why," said the King of Navarre, with his peculiar air, "what your Majesty alluded to but just now;" and inclining to the ear of the king, he finished with a burst of laughter. He laughed loudly.

"What is it, then?" asked the Duc de Guise, with hauteur, for like the rest of the world, he behaved very rudely to the poor King of Navarre. "Why should I not visit my sister-in-law; does not the Duc d'Alençon visit his?"

Henri colored slightly.

"What sister-in-law?" remarked Charles; "I do not know of any he has but the Queen Elizabeth."

"Your pardon, Sire; it was his sister, I should have said, — Madame Marguerite, whom we saw as we came hither half an hour since, in her litter, accompanied by two gallants, one on each side."

"Really?" said Charles; "what do you say to that, Henri?"

"That the Queen of Navarre is free to go where she pleases; but I doubt her having left the Louvre."

"And I am sure of it," said the Duc de Guise.

"And I also," said the Duc d'Anjou; "and the litter stopped in the Rue Cloche Percée."

"Your sister-in-law, then, — not this one," said Henri, pointing to the Hôtel de Condé, "but the other," and he turned his finger in the direction of the Hôtel de Guise, — "must also be of the party, for we left them together, and they are, as you know, inseparable."

"I do not understand what your Majesty implies," replied the Duc de Guise.

"Now to me," observed the king, "nothing can be more clear; and that is why there was a gallant on each side of the litter."

"Well," said the duke, "if there be any scandal on the part of the queen and of my sister in-law, we call on the justice of the king to put an end to it."

"Eh, *pardieu!*" said Henri, "let us have done with Mesdames de Condé and de Nevers. The king has no uneasiness about his sister; I have none for my wife."

"No, no," interposed Charles. "I will have the affair cleared up; but let us manage it ourselves. The litter, you say, Cousin, stopped in the Rue Cloche Percée?"

"Yes, Sire."

"You know the spot?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Well, then, let us go thither; and if it be necessary to burn down the house to know who is in it, why, we will do so."

It was with these inclinations, very discouraging for those concerned, that the four principal princes of the Christian world proceeded towards the Rue St. Antoine. When they reached the Rue Cloche Percée, Charles, who wished to confine the thing to his family, dismissed his attendants, desiring them to be near the Bastille at six o'clock in the morning with two horses.

There were only three houses in the Rue Cloche Percée; and therefore the search was less difficult, inasmuch as at two of these there was no refusal to open. At the third it was another matter; it was the house guarded by the German porter, and the German porter was not very tractable. Paris seemed destined to offer that night most memorable examples of fidelity on the part of servants. M. de Guise in vain threatened him in the purest Saxon; Henri d'Anjou in vain offered him a purse of gold; Charles

in vain went so far as to tell him that he was lieutenant of the watch, — the brave German gave no heed either to promises or threats. Seeing that they insisted in a manner that was becoming importunate, he thrust between the bars of iron the end of a certain arquebuse, — a demonstration which was only amusing to three of the four visitors (for Henri de Navarre stood apart as if he had no concern in the affair), since the weapon, confined by the bars to a single direction, could be dangerous only to one who should be blind enough to place himself directly in line with it.

When he found that they could neither intimidate nor corrupt the porter, the Duc de Guise, pretending to go away, went to the corner of the Rue St. Antoine, and there picked up one of those stones such as Ajax Telamon and Diomede lifted three thousand years before, and dashed it with violence against the door, which flew open with the concussion, knocking down the German, who fell heavily and with a loud cry that aroused the garrison, which else ran a great risk of being surprised.

Just at that moment La Mole was translating with Marguerite an idyl of Theocritus, and Coconnas was drinking, under pretext that he also was Greek, Syracusan wine with Henriette. Both conversations were violently interrupted. La Mole and Coconnas blew out all the lights instantly, and opening the windows, went out into the balcony, when seeing four men in the darkness they began to shower down upon them all the projectiles within reach, and make a noise by striking the stone walls with the flat of their swords. Charles, the most eager of the assailants, received a silver ewer on his shoulder, the Duc d'Anjou a basin containing a jelly of oranges and cinnamon, and the Duc de Guise a haunch of venison.

Henri received nothing ; he was quietly questioning the

porter whom M. de Guise had tied to the door, and who replied by his eternal "Ich verstehe nicht."

The women ably backed the besieged army and handed projectiles to them, which fell like hail.

"By the devil's death!" cried Charles, as he received on his head a stool which knocked his hat over his eyes and upon his nose, "if they do not open this moment I 'll hang them all."

"My brother!" said Marguerite to La Mole, in a low voice.

"The king!" said he to Henriette.

"The king! the king!" said she to Coconnas, who was drawing a large chest to the window, intending it especially for the Duc de Guise, whom, without knowing him, he had picked out as his peculiar antagonist, — "the king, I tell you!"

Coconnas let go the chest with an air of amazement. "The king?" said he.

"Yes, the king!"

"Then sound a retreat."

"Well, be it so. Marguerite and La Mole are off already."

"Which way?"

"Come this way, I tell you!" and taking him by the hand, Henriette led Coconnas by the secret door which led to the adjoining house, and having closed it after them they all four fled by the way that opened on the Rue Tizon.

"Ah, ah!" said Charles, "I think the garrison surrenders."

They waited several minutes; but no sound reached them.

"They are preparing some trick," said the Duc de Guise.

"More probably they have recognized my brother's voice and decamped," said the Duc d'Anjou.

"At any rate they will have to come this way," said Charles.

"Yes," replied the Duc d'Anjou, "unless the house has two exits."

"Cousin," said the king, "take up the stone again, and serve the inner door as you have the outer."

The duke burst the other door in with his foot.

"The torches! the torches!" said the king; and the lackeys having relighted them, came forward, and the king, taking one, handed the other to the Duc d'Anjou. The Duc de Guise went first, sword in hand; Henri brought up the rear.

They reached the first story, and in the dining-room found the relics of supper, with candelabra upset, furniture thrown over, and all the dishes except those of silver broken in pieces. They went into the salon, but there found no better clew to the identity of the persons than in the other room.

"There must be another way of egress," observed the king.

"Most probably," replied D'Anjou.

They searched on all sides, but found no door.

"Where is the porter?" inquired the king.

"I fastened him to the door," replied the Duc de Guise.

"Question him, Cousin."

"He will not answer."

"Bah! Have a little fire of dry wood kindled about his legs," said the king, smiling, "and he will certainly answer."

Henri looked out of the window, and observed, "He is there no longer."

"Who has set him free?" asked the Duc de Guise, quickly.

"Devil's death!" said the king, "we shall learn nothing now."

"In fact," said Henri, "you see plainly, Sire, that nothing proves that my wife and the Duc de Guise's sister-in-law have been in this house."

"That is true," said Charles. "Scripture teaches us that there are three things that leave no tracks: the bird in the air, the fish in the sea, and the woman — no, I am wrong — the man with —"

"So," interrupted Henri, "the best thing we can do —"

"— Is," said Charles, "for me to foment my bruise, D'Anjou to wipe away the marks of the orange-jam, and Guise to rub the grease from off his ruff."

They all went away without so much as closing the door after them. When they reached the Rue St. Antoine the king said to M. d'Anjou and the Duc de Guise, "Which way are you going, gentlemen?"

"Sire, we are going to Nantouillet's, who expects my cousin of Lorraine and myself to supper. Will your Majesty deign to accompany us?"

"No, I thank you; our way lies in an opposite direction. Will you have one of my torch-bearers?"

"No, I thank you, Sire," was D'Anjou's reply.

"Good! He is afraid I should watch him," whispered Charles in Henri's ear. Then, taking him by the arm, he said, "Come, Henriot, I will find you a supper to-night."

"Then we are not going back to the Louvre?" Henri asked.

"No, I tell you, you threefold thickhead! Come with me when I tell you; come, come!" And he conducted Henri by the Rue Geoffroy Lasnier.

CHAPTER V.

MARIE TOUCHET.

By way of the Rue Geoffroy Lasnier and the Rue Garnier sur l'Eau the two kings came to the Rue des Barres. There, after taking a few steps towards the Rue de la Mortellerie, they stopped before a small lone house in the middle of a garden, enclosed by high walls. Charles took a key from his pocket and opened the door; and then desiring Henri and the torch-bearer to enter, he closed the door after him. One small window only was lighted, to which Charles with a smile called Henri's attention.

"Sire, I do not understand," said the latter.

"You will soon understand, Henriot."

The King of Navarre looked at Charles with astonishment. His voice, his features, had an expression of gentleness so inconsistent with his character that Henri could hardly recognize him.

"Henriot," said the king to him, "I told you that when I go out from the Louvre I go out from hell. When I enter here I enter Paradise."

"Sire," said Henri, "I am glad that your Majesty deems me worthy to make the voyage to heaven in your company."

"The way is narrow," said the king, ascending a small stairway; "but it is so that nothing may be wanting to the comparison."

"And who is the angel that guards the entrance to your Eden, Sire?"

"You will see," replied Charles IX.; and making a sign to Henri to follow him without noise, he pushed open a first door, then a second, and paused on the threshold.

"Look!" he said.

Henri did so, and remained with his eyes fixed on as charming a picture as he had ever seen. It was a woman of eighteen or nineteen years of age, reposing at the foot of a bed, on which was a sleeping infant, whose two feet she held in her hands near her lips, while her long chestnut hair fell down like waves of gold. It was like a picture by Albano, representing the Virgin and the infant Jesus.

"Oh, Sire," said the King of Navarre, "who is this charming creature?"

"The angel of my Paradise, Henriot, — the only being who loves me for myself."

Henri smiled.

"Yes," said Charles, "for myself; for she loved me before she knew I was the king."

"Well, and since —"

"Well, and since, said Charles, with a sigh, which proved that this glittering royalty was sometimes a burden to him, — "since she has known it, she still loves me. Watch!"

The king approached her gently, and on the lovely cheek of the young woman impressed a kiss as light as that of the bee on a lily, yet it awoke her.

"Charles!" she murmured, opening her eyes.

"You see," said the king, "she calls me Charles; the queen says Sire."

"Oh," exclaimed the young girl, "you are not alone, my king!"

"No, my good Marie, I have brought you another king,

happier than myself, for he has no crown ; more unhappy than I, for he has no Marie Touchet."

"Sire, it is, then, the King of Navarre ? "

"Himself, my child. Come here, Henriot."

Henri went towards her, and Charles took his right hand. "Look at this hand, Marie," said he ; "it is the hand of a good brother and a loyal friend. And but for this hand — "

"Well, Sire ! "

"But for this hand, this day, Marie, our boy had been fatherless."

Marie uttered a cry, fell on her knees, seized Henri's hand, and kissed it.

"Well done, Marie ! well done ! " said Charles.

"And what have you done to thank him, Sire ? "

"I have done the same by him."

Henri looked at Charles with astonishment.

"You will know some day what I mean, Henriot ; meantime, come and look."

The king went to the bed where the child was still asleep. "Eh ! " said he, "if this stout boy slept in the Louvre instead of sleeping in this small house, he would change the aspect of things at present, and perhaps for the future. " [1]

"Sire," said Marie, "without offence to your Majesty, I prefer his sleeping here, — he sleeps better."

"Then we will not disturb his sleep," said the king. "It is so good to sleep without dreaming."

[1] This natural child was afterwards the famous Duc d'Angoulême, who died in 1650, and had he been legitimate, would have supplanted Henri III., Henri IV., Louis XIII., Louis XIV. What would he have given us instead ? The mind is confounded and overwhelmed in the obscurities of a problem like that.

"Well, Sire?" said Marie, pointing towards one of the doors.

"Yes, you are right, Marie; let us have supper."

"My dear Charles," said Marie, "you will beg the king your brother to excuse me, will you not?"

"And for what?"

"Because I have sent away our servants. Sire," she continued, addressing the King of Navarre, "you must know that Charles will be waited upon only by me."

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" said Henri, "I can easily believe it."

The two men went into the dining-room, while the mother, anxious and careful, covered with a warm wrapper the little Charles, who, thanks to his sound sleep of infancy which his father had envied, did not awake. Then she too went into the dining-room.

"Here are only two covers!" said the king.

"Allow me," said Marie, "to wait upon your Majesties."

"Come," said Charles, "see how you bring misfortune to me, Henriot."

"How, Sire?"

"Don't you see?"

"Pardon, Charles, pardon!" said Marie.

"I forgive you; but place yourself there, next to me, between us two."

Marie brought a plate and sat between the two kings, serving both.

"Is it not well, Henriot," asked Charles, "to have a place in the world in which one can venture to eat and drink without the necessity of any one tasting your viands before you eat them yourself?"

"I believe, Sire," was Henri's rejoinder, "that I can appreciate that better than any one."

"Assure her, Henriot, that in order to continue

thus happy it is better for her to keep free of politics, and especially to avoid making acquaintance with my mother."

"Queen Catherine does indeed love your Majesty so much that she might easily be jealous of any other love," replied Henri, finding in that subterfuge a way of escape from the dangerous confidence of the king.

"Marie," said the king, "I present to you one of the most shrewd and intelligent men I know. At the court — and that is saying a great deal — he has deceived every one; I alone, perhaps, have seen clearly into his mind, if not into his heart."

"Sire," said Henri, "I hope that in exaggerating the one you have no doubt of the other."

"I do not exaggerate anything, Henriot," replied the king; "and some day you will be known." Then, turning towards the young woman, "He is, for one thing, a capital master of anagrams. Bid him make one on your name, and I will answer for it he will."

"Oh, what can you find in the name of a poor girl like me? What pleasing idea could such a name as Marie Touchet suggest?"

"Sire," said Henri, "the anagram of that name is too easy; there is no merit in finding it."

"What! done already?" said Charles. "You see, Marie."

Henri took his tablets from the pocket of his doublet, tore out a page of the paper, and beneath the name "Marie Touchet," he wrote, "Je charme tout" ("I charm all"), and then handed the leaf to the young girl.

"Really," she exclaimed, "it is impossible!"

"What has he found?" inquired Charles.

"Sire, I dare not repeat it."

"Sire," said Henri, "in the name of Marie Touchet

there is letter for letter, only changing the I into J, which is customary, the words, 'Je charme tout.'"

"So it does," cried Charles, "letter for letter! This shall be your device, Marie, and never was device better merited. Thanks, Henriot! Marie, I will give it to you written in diamonds."

The supper was finished as it struck two o'clock by Notre Dame. "Now, Marie," said Charles, "in recompense for the compliment, give him an armchair in which he may sleep till daybreak, — a long way off from us, though, for he snores fearfully. If, Henriot, you wake before me, rouse me, for we must be at the Bastille by six o'clock. Good-night; make yourself as comfortable as you can. But," added the king, placing his hand on Henri's shoulder, "on your life, Henriot, on your life, understand, do not leave this house without me, especially to return to the Louvre!"

Henri had suspected too much to disregard this caution.

Charles IX. went to his chamber, and Henri, the hardy mountaineer, settled down in his armchair, and speedily justified the precaution his brother-in-law had taken in keeping him at a distance. In the morning Charles aroused Henri, and as he was dressed, his toilet did not occupy him very long. The king was happy and smiling as he was never seen to be at the Louvre. The hours spent by him in that little house in the Rue des Barres were his hours of happiness.

They passed through the bedchamber, where the young woman was sleeping in her bed, and the baby in its cradle. They both were smiling as they slept. Charles looked at them very tenderly, and turning to the King of Navarre, said to him, "Henriot, if you should ever learn what service I have this night rendered you, and any misfortune should happen to me, remember this child

which rests here in its cradle." Then kissing them both, he said, "Adieu, my angels!" and left the apartment. Henri followed, buried in thought.

Two horses, held by gentlemen of the king, awaited them at the Bastille; Charles made a sign to Henri to mount, and placed himself in the saddle. Going by the garden of the Arbalète, they went towards the exterior boulevards.

"Where are we going?" asked Henri.

"We are going," Charles replied, "to see if the Duc d'Anjou has returned only on account of Madame de Condé, or if — as I gravely suspect — there is in his heart as much ambition as love."

Henri did not understand the explanation; he followed Charles without speaking.

When they reached the Marais, where they were sheltered by the palisades, Charles directed Henri's attention through the thick haze of the morning to some men wrapped in long mantles and wearing fur caps, who were on horseback beside a wagon heavily laden. As they advanced, these men formed in lines, and among them, on horseback like the rest, and talking with them, appeared another man, wearing a long brown mantle and, shading his forehead, a French hat.

"Ah, ah!" said Charles, smiling, "I thought so."

"Eh, Sire," observed Henri, "I cannot be mistaken; that horseman in the brown mantle is the Duc d'Anjou."

"Himself," said Charles. "Keep back, Henriot! don't let them see us."

"And who are the other men, and what is in the wagon?"

"The men are the Polish ambassadors, and in the wagon is a crown; and now," he added, putting his horse to a gallop, "come, Henriot, for I have seen all I wished to see."

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETURN TO THE LOUVRE.

When Catherine believed that all was arranged in the King of Navarre's chamber, — that the dead soldiers were removed, Maurevel conveyed away, and the carpets washed, — she dismissed her maids, for it was nearly midnight. She tried to sleep; but the shock had been too severe, the deception too great. The detested Henri continually escaped her plots, well-laid and deadly as they were; he seemed protected by some invincible power, which Catherine persisted in calling Chance, although in the depths of her heart a voice told her that the real name of this power was Destiny. That idea, that the rumor of this new attempt, spreading through the Louvre and beyond the Louvre, would give to Henri and the Huguenots a greater confidence in the future than ever, exasperated her; and at that moment, if the chance against which she so unhappily contended had delivered to her her enemy, with the little Florentine dagger which she wore at her side she would no doubt have baffled that fatality so favorable to the King of Navarre.

The hours of the night — those hours so slow to him who wakes and watches — sounded one after another, and still Catherine could not close her eyes. A world of new projects were unfolded during those hours of the night in her mind filled with visions. At last, at the break of day she rose, dressed herself without assistance, and took her way towards the apartments of Charles IX. The guards,

who were accustomed to her visiting the king at all hours of day or night, allowed her to pass. She crossed the antechamber and entered the armory. There she found Charles's nurse.

"My son?" said the queen.

"Madame, he has forbidden that any one should enter his chamber before eight o'clock."

"That order, Nurse, is not for me."

"It is for every one, Madame."

Catherine smiled.

"Yes, I know well," continued the nurse, "that no one here has any right to obstruct your Majesty; I beseech you, then, to hear the prayer of a poor woman, and go no farther."

"Nurse, it is necessary that I should speak to my son."

"Madame, I will not open the door except on the formal order of your Majesty."

"Open, Nurse, I command you."

The nurse at this voice, more respected and more dreaded than that of Charles himself, presented the key to Catherine; but Catherine had no need of it. She took from her pocket a key of her own, which opened her son's door in an instant.

The chamber was unoccupied; Charles's bed was undisturbed; and his greyhound, Actæon, stretched on a bear-skin at the foot of the bed, rose and licked Catherine's ivory hands.

"Ah!" said the queen, frowning, "he has gone out; I will await him."

And she seated herself gloomily in the recess of a window which looked into the principal court of the Louvre. For two hours she remained there, pale and immovable as a marble statue, when at length she saw a troop of

cavaliers enter the gate, at the head of whom she beheld Charles and Henri de Navarre. Then she comprehended all. Charles, instead of debating with her as to the arrest of his brother-in-law, had carried him off, and thus saved him.

"Blind, blind, blind!" she murmured; and she waited where she was.

A moment later steps resounded in the adjoining room, which was the armory.

"Now, Sire," said Henri, "now that we have returned to the Louvre, tell me why you made me go away, and what is the service you have rendered me?"

"No, no, Henriot," replied Charles, laughing. "You will know some day perhaps; meantime it is a secret. But you may know that in all probability you will have cost me a rough quarrel with my mother."

In saying these words Charles lifted the tapestry and found himself in the presence of his mother. Behind him, and looking over his shoulder, was the pale and uneasy countenance of the Béarnais.

"Ah! you here, Madame?" said Charles IX., frowning.

"Yes, my son; I wish to speak with you."

"To me?"

"You, and alone."

"Well, well," said Charles, turning towards his brother-in-law, "since it cannot be avoided, the sooner the better."

"I leave you, Sire," said Henri.

"Yes, yes, do," replied Charles; "and since you are a Catholic, Henriot, go and hear Mass on my behalf; as for me, I shall stay and hear the sermon."

Henri bowed and went out. Charles IX., anticipating the questions which his mother would address to him, said, trying to turn the affair into a jest, "Well, Madame,

pardieu! you are going to scold me, are you not? I made your little plot fail most signally. Eh! death of a devil! I really could not allow to be arrested and conveyed to the Bastille the man who had just saved my life; nor could I allow myself to quarrel with you, — I am a good son. And then," he added in a lower tone, "the good God punishes those who quarrel with their mother. Forgive me, then, frankly, and admit that it was a good joke."

"Sire," replied Catherine, "your Majesty is mistaken; it was not a joke."

"Yes, yes, and so you will say, or the devil take me!"

"Sire, you have by your own fault caused the failure of a plan which would have led us to a grand discovery."

"Bah! a plan? Is it possible that you are annoyed by the failure of a plan, — you, Mother? You will make twenty others, and among them — well, I promise you my help."

"It is too late; for he is warned and will be on his guard."

"Come," said the king, "come, let us know all about it. What have you to complain of against Henriot?"

"Why, that he is in a conspiracy."

"Yes, of course, that is your everlasting accusation; but does n't every one conspire more or less in this charming royal residence called the Louvre?"

"But he conspires more than any one else; he is more dangerous than any one suspects."

"You see, the Lorenzino!" said Charles.

"Listen," said Catherine, her face darkening at the mention of that name, which recalled one of the most bloody catastrophes in Florentine history, — "listen: there is a way to prove to me that I am wrong."

"Well, how, Mother?"

"Ask Henri who was in his chamber last night; and if he tells you, I am ready to confess that I was wrong."

"But suppose it was a woman, we cannot require — "

"A woman?"

"Yes, a woman."

"A woman who killed two of your guards, and has wounded, perhaps mortally, M. Maurevel!"

"Ah, ah!" said the king, "this grows serious. There has been blood spilled, then?"

"Three men were left lying upon the floor."

"And he who left them in this condition — "

"Escaped safe and sound."

"By Gog and Magog!" cried Charles, "he was a gallant fellow, and you are right, Mother; I should like to know him."

"Well, I tell you beforehand you will not learn who it is, at least from Henri."

"But from you, Mother. This man did not escape without leaving some traces, — without some portion of his dress being remarked?"

"Nothing was observed but the elegant cherry-colored mantle which he wore."

"Ah, ah! a cherry-colored mantle!" said Charles; "I know but one at court so remarkable as to arrest attention."

"Precisely," said Catherine.

"Well?" replied Charles.

"Well," answered Catherine, "await me here, my son, while I go to see if my orders have been executed."

Catherine went out, leaving Charles alone, who paced up and down thoughtfully, whistling a hunting air, with one hand in his doublet, and letting the other hang down for his dog to lick every time he paused.

As to Henri, he had left his brother-in-law's apartments

very uneasy, and instead of going along the usual corridor, he had ascended the small private staircase we have before referred to, and which led to the second story; but scarcely had he gone up four steps when he saw a shadow. He stopped, and put his hand to his dagger, but immediately recognized a woman, who seized his hand, while a charming voice familiar to his ear said, "Heaven be praised, Sire! you are safe and sound. I was in great alarm about you, but Heaven has heard my prayer."

"What, then, has happened?" inquired Henri.

"You will know when you reach your apartments. Do not be uneasy about Orthon; I have taken care of him;" and the young woman descended the stairs rapidly, passing Henri as if she had met him accidentally.

"This is very strange," said Henri to himself; "what can have happened? What has befallen Orthon?"

The question, unfortunately, could not reach Madame de Sauve, for Madame de Sauve was already out of hearing. At the top of the staircase Henri saw another shadow; it was that of a man.

"Hush!" said this man.

"Ah, ah! is that you, François?"

"Do not mention my name."

"What has happened?"

"Go into your rooms, and you will see; then go quietly into the corridor, look carefully about and be sure that no one sees you, and come to me. My door will be ajar." And he disappeared, in his turn, down the staircase, like the ghosts which at the theatre sink through the floor.

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" muttered the Béarnais, "the mystery grows thicker; but as the solution is to be found in my apartments, let us go thither."

He reached the door, and listened; there was not a

sound. Charlotte had told him to go there, and it was thus evident there was nothing to fear. He entered, and cast a glance around the antechamber; it was unoccupied, and nothing indicated that anything had taken place.

"It is true, Orthon is not here," he remarked, and went to the inner chamber. Here all was explained. In spite of the water which had been copiously used, large red spots stained the floor; a piece of furniture was broken; the hangings of the bed were hacked with sword-cuts; a Venetian mirror was broken by the blow of a bullet; and a blood-stained hand had leaned against the wall and left against it a terrible imprint, announcing that this chamber had been the mute witness of a mortal struggle. Henri gazed with haggard eye at all these different details, and passing his hand over his brow, moist with perspiration, he murmured, "Ah! now I understand the service which the king has done me; they came to assassinate me, and — ah! — Mouy! what have they done with Mouy? Wretches! they have murdered him!"

Eager to receive the information which the Duc d'Alençon was to give him, Henri, after giving once more a sorrowful glance to the objects around him, hastened out of the chamber, gained the corridor, and after assuring himself that he was unobserved, went quickly to the duke's apartments. The duke awaited him in the first room. He eagerly took Henri's hand, and placing his finger on his lips, led him to a small room in the tower, completely isolated, where, therefore, they would be safe against discovery.

"Oh, my brother," he said, "what a horrible night!"

"What has happened?" asked Henri.

"They sought to arrest you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"And why?"

"I know not; where were you?"

"The king took me last night away with him into the city."

"Then he was aware of it," said D'Alençon. "But since you were not here, who was in your rooms?"

"Was any one there?" inquired Henri, as if ignorant of the fact.

"Yes, a man. When I heard the noise I ran to bring you succor, but it was too late."

"Was the man arrested?" inquired Henri, anxiously.

"No; he escaped, after having dangerously wounded Maurevel and killed two guards."

"Ah, brave Mouy!" cried Henri.

"Was it, then, Mouy?" said D'Alençon, quickly.

Henri saw that he had made a blunder. "At least, I presume so," he replied, "for I had given him an appointment to arrange with him as to your flight, and to tell him that I had ceded to you all my rights to the throne of Navarre."

"Then if the affair is known," said D'Alençon, turning pale, "we are lost."

"Yes; for Maurevel will tell."

"Maurevel has been wounded in the throat, and I have learned from the surgeon that he will not speak a word for eight days."

"Eight days! that is a longer time than Mouy requires to reach a place of safety."

"But it may be some other, and not M. de Mouy."

"Do you think so?" asked Henri.

"Yes; this person disappeared very swiftly, and nothing was seen but a cherry-colored cloak."

"Why, really," remarked Henri, "a cherry-colored cloak

is a thing for a fop, not for a soldier; no one would suspect Mouy of appearing in a cherry-colored cloak."

"No; and if any one were suspected," said D'Alençon, "it would rather be — " He paused.

"M. de la Mole," said Henri.

"Certainly; since I, who saw him myself, doubted for a moment."

"You doubted? Well, then, it might be M. de la Mole."

"Does he know nothing?" inquired D'Alençon.

"Nothing important."

"Brother," said the duke, "now I really believe it was he."

"The devil!" observed Henri, "if it be he, it will greatly annoy the queen, who takes an interest in him."

"An interest, say you?" said D'Alençon, amazed.

"Unquestionably. Do you not remember, François, that it was your sister who recommended him to you?"

"It was, indeed," said the duke, gloomily; "and so, being inclined to do him a service, and fearing that his red mantle might compromise him, I went up to his room and brought it away."

"Oh, oh!" said Henri; "that was doubly wise. And now I would not wager, I would swear that it was he."

"Do you mean that seriously?"

"Faith, yes; he came to bring me some message from Marguerite."

"If I were sure that you would support me, I myself would almost accuse him."

"If you accuse him," replied Henri, "understand, Brother, I shall not contradict you."

"But the queen?" said D'Alençon.

"Ah, yes! the queen."

"We must know what she will do."

"I will undertake that commission."

"Plague take it, Brother! she will be wrong to give us the lie, for here is a brilliant reputation for valor ready-made for that young man; and it will not have cost him much, for he will have bought it on credit. It is true, indeed, that he may be called on to pay capital and interest at once."

"Devil take it! what would you have?" inquired Henri. "In this world we have nothing for nothing;" and saluting D'Alençon, he cautiously looked out into the corridor, and being certain that no one listened he glided along and disappeared on the secret stairway that led to Marguerite's apartments.

The Queen of Navarre was hardly more at ease than her husband. The expedition of the night, directed against herself and Madame de Nevers by the king, the Duc d'Anjou, the Duc de Guise, and Henri, whom she had recognized, had greatly disturbed her. Doubtless there was no evidence that could compromise her; the porter declared that he had betrayed nothing. But four noblemen like those had not gone out of their way by chance, or without having a reason for so doing. Marguerite, then, had returned home at break of day, after spending the remainder of the night with the Duchesse de Nevers. She had gone to bed, but she could not sleep, and trembled at every sound. In the midst of these anxieties she heard some one knocking at the secret door, and ordered Gillonne to admit the visitor.

Henri paused at the door. Nothing in him announced the injured husband; his habitual smile was on his well-defined lips, and not a muscle of his countenance betrayed the severe emotions he had undergone. He looked at Marguerite to ascertain if she would allow him to remain alone with her, and Marguerite motioned Gillonne to retire.

"Madame," said Henri, "I know how deeply you are attached to your friends, and I fear I bring you unwelcome tidings."

"What are they, Sire?" asked Marguerite.

"One of our best-beloved servitors is greatly compromised at this moment."

"Who?"

"Our dear Comte de la Mole."

"And how?"

"In consequence of the adventure of last night."

Marguerite, in spite of her self-command, could not refrain from blushing. "What adventure?" she said.

"What!" said Henri; "did you not hear all the noise that was made at the Louvre last night?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Then I congratulate you, Madame," said Henri, with charming simplicity; "that shows how well you sleep."

"Well, what happened, then?"

"Why, our good mother had ordered M. Maurevel and six of her guards to arrest me."

"You, Monsieur; you?"

"Yes, me."

"And for what reason?"

"Ah! who can tell the reasons of such a mind as your mother's? I suspect them, but do not know them."

"And you were not in your chamber?"

"No, by accident you have guessed rightly, Madame. Last evening the king invited me to accompany him. But if I was not in my chamber, some other person was."

"And who was that other person?"

"It appears that it was the Comte de la Mole."

"The Comte de la Mole!" said Marguerite, amazed.

"*Tudieu!* only imagine what a stout fellow the Pro-

vençal was," continued Henri. "Why, he wounded Maurevel and killed two of the guards."

"Wounded M. Maurevel and killed two of the guards! Impossible!"

"What, do you doubt his courage, Madame?"

"No; but I say that M. de la Mole could not be in your apartments."

"Why not?"

"Because — because," answered Marguerite, greatly embarrassed, — "because he was elsewhere."

"Ah, if he can prove an *alibi*," observed Henri, "that is another thing. He will say where he was, and there's an end."

"Where he was?" said Marguerite, quickly.

"Assuredly. Before the day is over he will be arrested and questioned. But unfortunately, as they have proofs — "

"Proofs! What?"

"Why, the man who made this desperate defence wore a red cloak."

"But is M. de la Mole the only man who wears a red cloak? I know another person also."

"So do I; but then see what will happen. If it was not M. de la Mole, it was some other man in a red cloak like him, and you know who that man is."

"Heavens!"

"This is the breaker ahead of us. You have seen it as I have, Madame; and your emotion proves it. Let us, then, talk this matter over like two persons who speak of a thing the most coveted in the world, — a throne; of a thing most precious, — life. Mouy arrested, we are lost!"

"Yes; I understand that."

"While M. de la Mole can compromise nobody, — un-

less you think him capable of inventing some tale, as, for example, that he was with a party of ladies — "

"Monsieur," said Marguerite, "if you fear only that, be assured; he will not say it."

"What!". said Henri, "will he be silent, even if silence cost him his life?"

"He will, Monsieur."

"You are sure?"

"I will answer for him."

"Then all is for the best," said Henri, rising.

"Then you go, Monsieur — "

"To endeavor to get us out of the danger into which this devil of a man in the red cloak has plunged us."

"Ah, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* poor young man!" exclaimed Marguerite, in a paroxysm of grief, and wringing her hands.

"Really," said Henri, as he retired, "this dear M. de la Mole is a very faithful and gentlemanly servitor!"

CHAPTER VII.

INTERROGATORIES.

CHARLES had entered smiling and jesting into his apartments, but after ten minutes' conversation with his mother, it was she who had recovered her good-humor, and he who was serious and thoughtful.

"M. de la Mole!" said Charles, "M. de la Mole! we must summon Henri and D'Alençon, — Henri, because this young man is a Huguenot; D'Alençon, because he is in his service."

"Summon them if you will, my son; you will learn nothing. I fear there exists a better understanding between Henri and François than you imagine. If you question them you arouse their suspicions. If you wait a few days; if you give the culprits time to recover breath; if you allow them to believe that they have escaped your vigilance, — then, bold, triumphant, they will furnish you an occasion for severity; then we shall know all."

Charles walked up and down rapidly, biting his lips and pressing his hand to his heart, as if to restrain his wrath.

"No, no," said he, "I will not wait! You don't know what it is to wait, attended as I am by phantoms. Besides, these fops are becoming more insolent every day. Even last night did not two of them dare to oppose our will? If M. de la Mole is innocent, — good; but I shall not be sorry to know where M. de la Mole was last night when my guards were assailed in the Louvre, and I was

attacked in the Rue Cloche Percée. Let some one, then, go for the Duc d'Alençon, then for Henri. I will interrogate them separately. As for you, you can stay if you please."

The Duc d'Alençon entered. His conversation with Henri had prepared him for this interview; he was therefore quite self-possessed. His answers were precise. Warned by his mother not to leave his apartments, he was ignorant of the events of the night. Only, as those apartments were in the same corridor as the King of Navarre's he had heard footsteps, then the sound of a door opening, and the report of fire-arms; he had ventured to open his door slightly, and had seen a man in a red mantle escape. Charles and the queen looked at each other.

"In a red mantle?" said the king.

"In a red mantle," replied D'Alençon.

"And did not this mantle suggest to you any suspicions as to who the person was?"

D'Alençon collected all his presence of mind in order to lie more naturally. "I confess," said he, "I thought I recognized the mantle of one of my gentlemen."

"Which of them?"

"M. de la Mole."

"Why was he not in attendance on you as his duty required?"

"I had given him leave of absence."

"That will do; go."

The duke advanced towards the door.

"No; this way," said Charles, pointing to the door which led to his nurse's apartments. He did not wish François and Henri to meet. He was ignorant that they had already met for a few moments, and that those few moments had sufficed to arrange their plans.

As D'Alençon went out, Henri entered, on a signal

given by Charles. He did not wait for Charles to question him. "Sire," said he, "you have done well to send for me, for I was coming to seek you, to demand justice."

Charles frowned.

"Yes, justice!" said Henri. "I begin by thanking your Majesty for having taken me with you last night, for I now know that by so doing you saved my life; but what have I done to deserve being assassinated?"

"It was not an assassination," said Catherine; "it was an arrest."

"Well!" returned Henri, "what crime have I committed that I should be arrested? I am as guilty to-day as yesterday. What is my crime, Sire?"

Charles looked at his mother, somewhat embarrassed for an answer.

"My son," said Catherine, "you hold communication with suspected persons."

"Well," said Henri, "and these suspected persons compromise me, is it not so, Madame?"

"Yes, Henri."

"Name them, then; name them to me! Confront me with them!"

"Indeed," said Charles, "Henriot has the right to ask an explanation."

"And I demand one," said Henri, who saw his advantage, and resolved to use it, — "I demand one from my good brother Charles, from my good mother Catherine. Since my marriage, have I not been a good husband? Ask Marguerite. A good Catholic? Ask my confessor. A good brother? Ask all those who were at the hunt yesterday."

"It is true, Henriot," replied the king; "but they say you conspire."

"Against whom?"

"Against me."

"Sire, were that true, I needed only to have let events take their course when the boar was on you."

"Eh, *mort diable!* he is right, Mother."

"But who was last night in your apartments?"

"Madame," returned Henri, "in a time when so few can answer for themselves, I will not undertake to answer for others. I left my apartments at seven o'clock in the evening, and the king took me away with him at ten. I was with him all night. I could not be with him and at the same time know what was taking place in my apartments."

"But," said Catherine, "it is not the less true that some one of your followers killed two of the king's guards, and wounded M. Maurevel."

"One of my followers!" cried Henri. "Name him, then, Madame; name him!"

"Every one accuses M. de la Mole."

"M. de la Mole is not in my service, but in that of the Duc d'Alençon, to whom Marguerite recommended him."

"But," said Charles, "was it M. de la Mole who was there, Henriot?"

"How should I know, Sire? I do not say yes or no. M. de la Mole is a very gallant gentleman, devoted to the Queen of Navarre; and he often brings me messages from Marguerite, to whom he is very grateful for having recommended him to the Duc d'Alençon, or from the duke himself. I cannot say that it was not M. de la Mole."

"It was he," said Catherine; "he was recognized by his red mantle."

"Ah, he has a red mantle?" asked Henri.

"Yes."

"And the man who so maltreated my two guards and M. Maurevel —"

"Had a red mantle?" asked Henri.

"Precisely," said Charles.

"I have nothing to say to that," answered the Béarnais. "But it seems to me that instead of sending for me, it was M. de la Mole who should have been sent for; but there is one thing I would remark."

"What is that?"

"If it had been myself who, seeing an order signed by my king, had refused to obey that order, I should have been culpable and deserving of punishment; but it was not I, — it was a person unknown, whom that order did not concern. They tried to arrest him without authority, and he defended himself; he had a right to do so."

"Yet —" murmured Catherine.

"Madame," demanded Henri, "was the order to arrest me?"

"Yes; and the king himself had signed it."

"But was it in the order to arrest any one found in my place?"

"No," said Catherine.

"Well, then," continued Henri, "unless it can be proved that I am plotting against the king, and that the man in my chamber is plotting with me, he is innocent. Sire," continued he, turning to Charles IX., "I do not leave the Louvre. I am ready at your Majesty's orders to retire to any state-prison you may think fit to indicate; but in the mean time, and until proof to the contrary, I have a right to declare myself the loyal subject and brother of your Majesty." And saluting them with an air of dignity Charles had never before seen in him, Henri withdrew.

"Bravo, Henriot!" cried Charles.

"Bravo! because he has beaten us?"

"And why not? When he hits me in fencing, don't I cry bravo? Mother, you are wrong to despise this young man."

"My son," said Catherine, seizing the king's hand, "I do not despise, I fear him."

"Well, you're wrong. Henriot is my friend; and as he said, if he were really plotting against me, he need only have let the boar alone yesterday."

"Yes," said Catherine, "and so have made D'Anjou, his personal enemy, King of France."

"Never mind what motive made him save my life; suffice it, he did save it, and, death of all the devils! I will not have him meddled with. As for M. de la Mole, I will speak to D'Alençon about him."

Catherine withdrew, trying to fix definitely her wandering suspicions. M. de la Mole was of too little consequence to satisfy the requirements of her plans. On re-entering her chamber, she found Marguerite waiting for her. "Ah, ah!" said she, "it is you, my daughter; I sent for you last night."

"I know it, Madame. I had gone out."

"And this morning?"

"This morning, Madame, I come to tell your Majesty that you are about to commit a great injustice."

"What is it?"

"You are going to arrest M. de la Mole."

"You are mistaken, my daughter; I arrest no one. It is the king who arrests, not I."

"Let us not play with words, Madame, when the circumstances are so grave. M. de la Mole is to be arrested, is he not?"

"It is probable."

"Accused of having killed two of the king's guards, and wounded M. Maurevel last night, in the King of Navarre's chamber?"

"That is indeed the crime of which he is accused."

"He is wrongfully accused; M. de la Mole is not guilty."

"Not guilty!" cried Catherine, joyfully; for she hoped to learn something from what Marguerite was about to tell her.

"No," returned Marguerite; "he cannot be guilty, for he was not there."

"Where was he, then?"

"With me, Madame."

"With you?"

"Yes, with me."

Catherine, instead of exhibiting consternation and anger at such a confession by a daughter of France, quietly folded her hands in her lap.

"And," she said after a moment of silence, "if they arrest M. de la Mole and question him —"

"He will say where and with whom he was, Mother," said Marguerite, although certain that he would not.

"Since that is so, you are right, my child; it is best that M. de la Mole should not be arrested."

Marguerite shuddered. There seemed to be in her mother's manner as she said these words a mysterious and ominous significance; but Marguerite had nothing to say, for what she had come to demand had been granted.

"But, then," said Catherine, "if it was not M. de la Mole, it was some one else."

Marguerite was silent.

"Do you know who it was?"

"I do not," returned Marguerite, hesitatingly.

"Come, do not tell me the truth by halves."

"I tell you, Madame, I do not know," said Marguerite, turning pale in spite of herself.

"Well, well," said the queen-mother, with an air of indifference, "we shall find out. Go, my child; your mother watches over your honor."

Marguerite retired.

"Ah!" murmured Catherine, "Henri and Marguerite have an understanding together, — provided she is silent, he is blind. Ah, my children, you think yourselves strong in your union, but I will crush you. Besides, all must be known the day when Maurevel can write or pronounce six letters." And hereupon Catherine returned to the royal apartments, where she found Charles in conference with D'Alençon.

"You here, Mother?" said Charles.

"Why not say *again*, for that was in your thoughts?"

"I keep my thoughts to myself," returned the king, with that harsh tone he sometimes adopted, even to Catherine. "What have you to say?"

"That you were right, Charles; and you, D'Alençon, wrong."

"How?" cried both together.

"It was not La Mole who was in the King of Navarre's apartments."

"Ah, ah!" said François, turning pale.

"And who was it, then?" asked Charles.

"We shall know when Maurevel is recovered; but let us speak of La Mole."

"What do you want with him, since he was not with the King of Navarre?"

"No," said Catherine, "he was not with the king, but he was with — the queen."

"With the queen!" cried Charles, bursting into a troubled laugh.

"With the queen!" murmured D'Alençon, becoming as pale as a corpse.

"Why, no, no!" said Charles, "Guise told us he met her litter."

"Just so," said Catherine; "she has a house in the city."

"Rue Cloche Percée?" cried the king.

"Oh, oh! that is too much!" said D'Alençon, digging his nails into his flesh. "And she recommended him to me!"

"Ah! now I think of it," said the king, suddenly, "it is he who defended himself against us last night, and who threw a dish on my head, — the scoundrel!"

"Oh, yes!" repeated François, "the scoundrel!"

"You are right, my children," said Catherine; "for the least indiscretion of this gentleman might occasion a horrible scandal, involving a daughter of France! It needs but a moment of intoxication —"

"Or of vanity," said François.

"Doubtless," returned Charles; "but we cannot carry the cause before the judges until Henri consents."

"My son," said Catherine, significantly, "a crime has been committed, and there may be scandal. But it is not by judges and executioners that crimes of this sort against the royal majesty are punished. Were you simple gentlemen, I should need say nothing to you, for you are both brave; but you are princes, and cannot cross swords with an inferior in rank. Think, then, how to avenge yourselves as princes."

"Death of all the devils! you are right, Mother; I will think of it."

"And I will help you, Brother," cried François.

"I leave you," said Catherine; "but I leave you this to represent me." As she spoke, she untied the silken cord that passed thrice round her waist, and of which the two tassels fell to her knees, and cast it at the feet of the two princes.

"Ah," said Charles, "I understand."

"This cord —" said D'Alençon.

"Is punishment and silence," replied Catherine, victorious; "but, first, it will be as well to mention the thing to Henri." And she retired.

"*Pardieu!*" replied D'Alençon, "a good suggestion; and when Henri learns that his wife betrays him — So," he added, turning to the king, "you have adopted the advice of our mother?"

"In all respects," said Charles, not suspecting that he plunged a thousand daggers in D'Alençon's heart. "That will annoy Marguerite, but it will please Henriot."

Then calling an officer of the guards he ordered that Henri should be summoned; but changing his mind, "No," said he, "I will see him myself; do you inform D'Anjou and Guise."

And leaving the room, he ascended the private staircase which led to Henri's chamber.

CHAPTER VIII.

PROJECTS OF VENGEANCE.

Henri had profited by the moment's respite from the examination he had undergone so successfully to fly to Madame de Sauve's. There he found Orthon quite recovered; but Orthon could tell him nothing, except that some armed men had entered the apartments, and that one of them had struck him with the hilt of his sword.

As for Orthon, no one had taken any heed to him; Catherine had seen him senseless, and believed he was dead. On coming to himself, in the interval between her departure and the arrival of the captain of the guard, he had taken refuge with Madame de Sauve.

Henri besought Charlotte to let the young man remain with her until he heard from Mouy, who would certainly write to him. He would then despatch Orthon to him, and instead of one, have two men on whom to rely in any emergency. This plan formed, he had returned to his apartments, and was walking up and down in meditation when the door opened, and Charles entered.

"Your Majesty!" cried Henri, hastening to meet the king.

"I myself. Henriot, you are an excellent fellow, and I find that I love you more and more."

"Sire," said Henri, "you overwhelm me."

"You have but one fault."

"If your Majesty will explain yourself, I will seek to correct it," said Henri, who saw by the king's face that he was in an excellent humor.

"It is that having good eyes you do not use them."

"Bah!" said Henri; "am I, then, near-sighted without knowing it?"

"Worse than that, Henriot, worse than that, — you are blind."

"Ah! that may be," said the Béarnais; "but perhaps that misfortune comes to me only when I close my eyes."

"Yes, very likely," said Charles; "you are indeed capable of it. But now I am going to open your eyes."

"God said, 'Let there be light!' and there was light. Your Majesty is the representative of God in this world; you can do therefore on earth what God does in the heavens. I listen."

"When Guise told you last night that he saw your wife pass with a gallant, you would not believe it."

"Sire, how could I believe your Majesty's sister would commit such an indiscretion?"

"When he told you your wife had gone to the Rue Cloche Percée, you would not believe that."

"How could I believe, Sire, that a daughter of France would thus publicly risk her reputation?"

"When we besieged the house, and I received a silver dish on my shoulder, D'Anjou a plate of orange-jam on his head, and Guise a haunch of venison in his face, did you not see two men and two women?"

"I saw nothing, Sire; your Majesty may remember that I was questioning the porter."

"Eh, *corbœuf!* I did, then."

"Ah, if your Majesty saw anything, that makes it another matter."

"That is, I saw two men and two women. Well, I

now know beyond a doubt that one of the women was Margot, and one of the men La Mole."

"But," said Henri, "if M. de la Mole was in the Rue Cloche Percée, he could not be here."

"No, no, he was not here; but never mind that, we shall know who was here when that blockhead Maurevel can write or speak. The question is whether Margot is deceiving you."

"Bah!" said Henri, "don't trust to lying rumors."

"I said well that you are more than near-sighted, that you are blind! Devil's death! won't you believe me once, you stubborn fellow? I tell you that Margot deceives you, and that this evening we are going to strangle the object of her affections."

Henri started, and looked with an air of bewilderment at the king.

"You won't be sorry for that, I know, Henriot. Margot will cry like a thousand Niobes; but I won't have you made a fool of. Let D'Anjou deceive Condé, I do not care, — Condé is my enemy; but you are my brother, my friend."

"But, Sire — "

"I will not have you molested. You are deceived, as may happen to any one; but you shall have such a reparation that to-morrow every one shall say, 'Thousand names of a devil! The king loves his brother Henriot, for he twisted M. de la Mole's neck finely for his sake last night.'"

"Are you quite resolved, Sire?" asked Henri.

"Resolved, decided, determined. The fop will have nothing to complain of; we make an expedition, — myself, D'Anjou, D'Alençon, and Guise, — a king, two sons of France, and a sovereign prince, without counting you."

"How, without counting me?"

"Of course you will be with us."

"I?"

"Yes, you? Stab the fellow for me in royal fashion while we strangle him."

"Sire," said Henri, "your goodness overwhelms me; but are you sure?"

"Eh! horn of the devil! it appears that the fellow boasts of it. He goes sometimes to see her at the Louvre, sometimes at the Rue Cloche Percée. They make verses together, — I should like to see that fop's verses, — pastorals; they talk of Bion and Moschus, of Daphnis and Corydon. Ah, bah! take a dagger with you at least."

"Sire," said Henri, "upon reflection, your Majesty will comprehend that I cannot take part in this expedition. I am too much interested in it not to have my presence ascribed to a desire of vengeance. Your Majesty punishes a man who calumniates your sister; and Marguerite, whom I maintain innocent, is not dishonored. But if I am associated with it, my co-operation converts an act of justice into an act of vengeance. It is no longer an execution, it is an assassination; and my wife is no longer calumniated, she is guilty."

"*Mordieu*, Henriot! you speak words of gold; I told my mother just now that you have the intelligence of a demon." And Charles regarded his brother-in-law complacently. Henri bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment.

"Nevertheless," added Charles, "you will be pleased to get rid of that fop?"

"Whatever your Majesty may do will be well done," replied the King of Navarre.

"Well, well, leave all to me. It shall not be the worse executed."

"I leave it all in your hands, Sire," said Henri.

"At what time does he usually go to your wife's apartments?"

"About nine o'clock."

"And at what hour does he leave?"

"Before I come, for I never see him."

"What time is that?"

"About eleven."

"Good! come down this evening at midnight; all will be over." And Charles, after shaking Henri's hand, and renewing his protestations of friendship, left the apartment, whistling a favorite hunting air.

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" said the Béarnais, following Charles with his eyes, "I will wager anything that the queen-mother is at the bottom of all this deviltry. She knows no better than to try to get up a quarrel between my wife and myself, — and such a pretty scheme!" And Henri laughed as he could laugh when no one was near to hear him.

At seven o'clock the same evening, a young man who had just left the bath, perfumed and attired himself, humming a gay air the while. Beside him slept, or rather reclined on the bed, another young man.

The one was our friend La Mole, who had been so much an object of interest through the day, and still drew to himself more attention than he dreamed of; and the other was his companion Coconnas.

In fact, all that storm had been going on around him without his hearing the growling of the thunder, or seeing the lightning-flashes. Returning home at three o'clock in the morning, he had stayed in bed till three o'clock in the afternoon, half sleeping, half dreaming, building castles on that moving sand we call the future; then he had risen, spent an hour at some fashionable baths, had dined

at Maître la Hurière's, and on returning to the Louvre, had completed his preparations for his customary visit to the queen.

"And you say you have dined?" said Coconnas, yawning.

"Faith, yes; and with a good appetite."

"Why did n't you take me with you, egotist?"

"Faith, you were so sound asleep that I was unwilling to wake you. But we will have supper instead of dinner. Don't forget to ask Maître la Hurière for that Anjou wine which he has lately received."

"Is it good?"

"Try it; I will say no more."

"And you, where are you going?"

"Where am I going?" said La Mole, surprised that his friend should ask the question. "I am going to the queen."

"Ah, true! I forgot. Here is your mantle."

"No, that is the black; I want the cherry one; the queen prefers me in that."

"Ah, upon my word!" said Coconnas; "look for yourself. I do not see it."

"Not see it!" replied La Mole; "where can it be, then?"

At this moment, when after having turned everything upside down La Mole was beginning to abuse the thieves who dared even rob in the Louvre, the door opened, and a page of the Duc d'Alençon appeared with the mantle in question.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "here it is."

"Yes, Monsieur, Monseigneur sent for it to decide a wager about its color."

"Oh!" said La Mole. "I wanted it only because I was going out; but if his Highness wishes to keep it —"

"No, Monsieur the Count, it is all over."

The page retired, and La Mole clasped on his cloak.

"Well," said he to Coconnas, "what are you going to do?"

"I do not know."

"Shall I find you here this evening?"

"How do you suppose I can tell you that?"

"You don't know what you will be doing in two hours?"

"I know what I shall do, but don't know what will be done to me."

"The Duchesse de Nevers?"

"No, the Duc d'Alençon."

"In fact," said La Mole, "I notice that for some time past he seems particularly friendly to you."

"Well, yes," said Coconnas.

"Then your future is made," said La Mole, smiling.

"Bah!" said Coconnas, "a cadet!"

"Oh!" said La Mole, "he has such a desire to become the heir that perhaps Heaven will work a miracle in his favor. So you don't know where you will be this evening?"

"No."

"To the devil, then, — or rather, adieu."

"That La Mole is a terrible fellow," thought Coconnas, "he 's always wanting to know where one is going, as if one knew;" and he composed himself to sleep.

As for La Mole, he betook himself to the Queen of Navarre's apartments. In the corridor he met the Duc d'Alençon.

"Ah, it is you, La Mole?" said he.

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Are you going out of the Louvre?"

"No, your Highness, I am going to pay my respects to the Queen of Navarre."

"At what time shall you leave her?"

"Has Monseigneur any orders for me?"

"No, but I shall have this evening."

"At what hour?"

"From nine to ten."

"I will not fail to wait on your Highness."

"Well, I rely upon you."

La Mole bowed, and went on.

"It is very strange," thought he; "the duke is pale sometimes as a corpse."

And he knocked at the door. Gillonne, who seemed to be watching for his arrival, opened it, and conducted him to the queen. Marguerite was occupied with something that seemed to fatigue her greatly; a paper covered with erasures, and a volume of Isocrates lay before her. She signed to La Mole to let her finish the sentence, and then casting aside her pen, invited him to sit by her.

La Mole had never seemed so handsome and so gay. "Greek!" cried he, glancing at the volume; "Isocrates! what are you doing? Ah, and on this paper Latin, — 'Ad Sarmatiæ legatos reginæ Margaritæ concio,' — you are going to harangue these barbarians in Latin, then?"

"I must, since they do not understand French."

"But how can you compose the answer without having the address?"

"A person more cunning than I might make you believe in an improvisation; but for you, my Hyacinthe, I have no such trickery; they have given me the address in advance, and I respond to it."

"Are these ambassadors, then, about to arrive?"

"Better still, they arrived this morning."

"But no one knows it?"

"They have come incognito. Their formal entrance is appointed for day after to-morrow, I believe. As for the

rest, you will see," said Marguerite, with a slight air of pedantry, "that what I have written is Ciceronian enough; but let us drop these vanities. Let us talk of what has happened to you."

"To me?"

"Yes."

"What has happened to me?"

"Ay, what has happened to you? you look pale."

"I confess it, but it is from too much sleep."

"Come, come, do not boast, I know all."

"Tell me what you mean, my pearl, for I know nothing."

"Come, answer me frankly. What has the queen-mother asked of you?"

"The queen-mother, of me? Had she, then, something to say to me?"

"What! have you not seen her?"

"No."

"And King Charles?"

"No."

"And the King of Navarre?"

"No."

"But the Duc d'Alençon, you have seen him?"

"Yes, just now. I met him in the corridor."

"What did he say to you?"

"That he had some orders to give me, between nine and ten o'clock this evening."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"It is strange!"

"But tell me, what is strange?"

"That you have heard nothing."

"What, then, has happened?"

"It has happened, unhappy man, that all this day you have been suspended over an abyss."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"How so?"

"Listen; Mouy, surprised last night in the apartments of the King of Navarre, whom they wished to arrest, killed three men, and escaped without being recognized, except by the red mantle he wore."

"Well?"

"This red mantle, which once deceived me, has deceived others also. You are suspected of this triple murder. This morning you would have been arrested, tried, — who knows? — condemned perhaps; for to save yourself you would not have told where you were, would you?"

"Told where I was?" cried La Mole; "compromise you, — you, my beautiful queen? Oh, never, never! I would have died joyfully to spare your glorious eyes but one tear."

"Alas, my poor friend!" replied the queen, "my glorious eyes would have wept many, many tears!"

"But how was this storm appeased?"

"Guess."

"I cannot."

"There was but one way of proving that you were not in the king's chamber."

"And that was —"

"To say where you were."

"Well!"

"And I said it."

"To whom?"

"To my mother."

"And Queen Catherine —"

"Knows that you are my lover."

"Oh, Madame, after having done so much for me, my life belongs to you!"

"I hope so, for I have snatched it from those who wished to take it; but now you are saved."

"Saved by you!" cried the young man; "by you whom I adore—"

At this moment a sharp noise made them both start. La Mole recoiled in undefined terror, and Marguerite, uttering a cry, fixed her eyes on a broken pane in the window. By this pane a stone of the size of an egg had entered, and lay on the floor.

La Mole saw the broken window, and comprehending the cause of the noise, "Who has dared to do this?" he cried, and darted towards the window.

"Stay," said Marguerite; "it seems to me something is fastened to the stone."

"It looks like a letter," replied La Mole.

Marguerite eagerly caught up the stone, round which was wound a slip of paper. The paper was fastened to a thread which passed out of the window. Marguerite opened and read it.

"Oh, Heaven!" cried she, holding out the paper, "La Mole!"

He looked and read:—

"M. de la Mole is waited for by long swords in the corridor leading to M. d'Alençon's apartments; perhaps he would prefer leaving the Louvre by this window, and joining M. de Mouy at Mantes."

"But," said La Mole, "are these swords longer than mine?"

"No, but there are perhaps ten against one."

"And who is the friend who sends us this letter?" asked La Mole.

Marguerite looked at it attentively.

"The writing of the King of Navarre," said she. "If he warns us, the danger is real; fly, then, fly!"

"How?"

"Does it not mention the window?"

"Command, and I will leap from the window, were it twenty times as high!"

"Stay," said Marguerite, "it seems to me that this string supports a weight."

"Let us see."

And both, drawing towards them the string, saw with unspeakable joy the end of a ladder of silk.

"Ah, you are saved!" said Marguerite.

"It is a miracle of Heaven!"

"No, it is a gift of the King of Navarre."

"What if it were a snare laid for me," said La Mole; "what if this ladder were to break beneath me! Have you not to-day avowed your love for me, Marguerite?"

Marguerite, to whose cheeks joy had restored the color, became deadly pale. "You are right," said she; "it is possible." And she darted towards the door.

"Where are you going?" cried La Mole.

"To assure myself that you are really waited for in the corridor."

"Never, lest their vengeance fall on you!"

"What can they do to me? A queen and a woman, I am doubly inviolable."

The queen said this with so much dignity that La Mole felt that she ran no risk, and that it was best to let her do as she wished. Marguerite intrusted La Mole to Gillonne, leaving it to her sagacity to decide according to circumstances whether he should fly or await her return. She advanced into the corridor that led to the library and a suite of reception-rooms, which opened into the king's and queen-mother's apartments and to the private staircase leading to D'Alençon's apartments. Although it was hardly nine o'clock, all the lights were

extinguished, and except for a slight glimmer at the end, the corridor was quite dark. The queen advanced with a firm step; but arrived halfway, she heard a sound of voices whispering, to which the effort of suppression gave a mysterious and hollow sound. But all noise soon ceased, as if at the command of a superior, and the light, feeble as it was, seemed to diminish. Marguerite advanced, going straight to the danger which, if it existed, awaited her; she seemed calm, but in reality the clinching of her hands showed violent nervous agitation. As she approached the lights, the silence seemed to grow more intense, and a shadow like a hand obscured the flickering ray. Suddenly a man sprang forward, uncovered a taper, and exclaimed, "Here he is!"

Marguerite found herself face to face with her brother Charles. Behind him stood D'Alençon, a cord of silk in his hand. At the back two shadows were visible, with swords in their hands. Marguerite saw all this at a glance, and replied, smilingly, "You mean, here *she* is."

Charles recoiled; the rest stood motionless. "You here, Margot? Where are you going at this hour?" said he.

"At this hour?" said Marguerite, "is it, then, so late?"

"I ask you where are you going?"

"To get one of the volumes of Cicero, which I think I left in our mother's apartments."

"Without a light?"

"I thought the corridor was lighted."

"And you come from your own apartments?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing, then, this evening?"

"Preparing my speech for the Polish ambassadors. Is there not to be a council to-morrow; and is it not understood that every one will submit his address to your Majesty?"

"Is any one helping you?"

Marguerite made a violent effort. "M. de la Mole," replied she. "He is very learned."

"So much so," said D'Alençon, "that I requested him when he should have finished with you to come and help me, who am not so clever as you are."

"You are waiting for him?"

"Yes," returned D'Alençon, impatiently.

"Then," said Marguerite, "I will send him to you, Brother, — for we have finished."

"And your book?" said Charles.

"Gillonne can fetch it."

The two brothers interchanged a sign.

"Go, then," said Charles. "We will continue our round."

"Your round?" asked Marguerite. "Whom are you looking for, then?"

"The little red man," returned Charles; "do you not know he is said to haunt the Louvre? D'Alençon says he has seen him; and we are in search of him."

"Success to your chase!" said Marguerite; and she withdrew, casting a look behind. She saw upon the wall of the corridor the four shadows reunited as if for conference. In a second she was at her door. "Open, Gillonne!" cried she.

Gillonne obeyed. Marguerite sprang into the apartment, and found La Mole resolute and calm, his sword drawn.

"Fly!" said the queen; "fly instantly! There is no time to be lost! They await you in the corridor to murder you."

"You command it?" said La Mole.

"I wish it. We must separate now, that we may meet again."

During her absence La Mole had attached the ladder,

and he now stepped on it, after having tenderly embraced the queen. "Should I perish, remember your promise!" said he.

"It is not a promise, but an oath. Adieu!"

Encouraged by these words, La Mole glided down the ladder. At this moment some one knocked at the door. Marguerite did not leave the window until she had seen La Mole reach the ground in safety.

"Madame!" said Gillonne; "Madame!"

"Well."

"The king is knocking at the door."

"Open it."

Gillonne did so.

The four princes, doubtless impatient with waiting, stood at the threshold; Charles entered. Marguerite advanced to meet him with a smile on her lips.

The king cast a quick glance around.

"Whom are you seeking, Brother?" asked the queen.

"Whom am I seeking?" said Charles. "*Corbœuf!* I am seeking M. de la Mole."

"M. de la Mole?"

"Yes; where is he?"

Marguerite took her brother's hand, and led him to the window. At this moment two men from beneath the window started off on horseback at full speed; one of them detached his white satin scarf, and waved it in the air. They were La Mole and Orthon. Marguerite pointed them out with her finger to Charles.

"What does this mean?" asked he.

"It means," returned Marguerite, "that M. d'Alençon may put his cord in his pocket, and M.M. d'Anjou and de Guise may sheathe their swords, for M. de la Mole will not pass through the corridor to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ATRIDES.

Since his return to Paris, Henri d'Anjou had not had a confidential interview with his mother Catherine, of whom, as everybody knows, he was the favorite son. That interview would not be to him an empty subservience to etiquette, nor a ceremonial disagreeable to perform, but the fulfilment of a duty very pleasant to that son, who, if he did not love his mother, was sure, at least, of being tenderly loved by her.

In fact Catherine really preferred this son, either for his courage or for his beauty, — for there was in Catherine something of the woman as well as mother, — or in short, because, according to certain chronicles of scandal, Henri d'Anjou recalled to the Florentine a happy period of secret amours.

She alone knew of his return to Paris, of which Charles IX. would have remained ignorant if chance had not conducted him to the Hôtel de Condé at the moment when his brother was leaving it. Charles had not expected him until the next day, and Henri d'Anjou had hoped to conceal from him the two motives which had hastened his arrival by a day; namely, his visit to the lovely Marie de Cleves, Princesse de Condé, and his conference with the Polish ambassadors.

When the Duc d'Anjou, so long expected, entered his mother's apartments, Catherine, usually so cold and unmoved, and who, since the departure of her son, had

embraced no one with warmth except Coligny, who was to be murdered next day, opened her arms to the child of her love, and pressed him to her breast with an effusion of maternal affection astonishing to find in that withered heart.

"Ah, Madame," said he, "since Heaven gives me the satisfaction of embracing my mother without witness, pray console the most wretched man in the world."

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* my dear child," cried Catherine, "what has happened to you?"

"Nothing that you do not know, Mother. I am in love, I am beloved; but this very love, which would form the bliss of any other, causes my misery."

"Explain yourself, my son," said Catherine.

"Ah, Mother, these ambassadors, this departure."

"Yes," said Catherine, "the ambassadors have arrived; the departure is nigh at hand."

"It needs not be nigh at hand, but my brother urges it; he hates me. I am in his way, and he wishes to be rid of me."

Catherine smiled. "By giving you a throne? Unhappy crowned head!"

"Oh, I do not want it, Mother!" replied Henri, in agony; "I do not wish to go. I, a son of France, brought up in the refinement of polished manners, beside a tender mother, beloved by one of the most charming women on earth, — must I go, then, to those snows at the farthest extremity of the earth, to die by inches among coarse, rough people, who are intoxicated from morning till night, and gauge the capacities of their king as they do those of a cask, by the quantity he can hold? No, no, my mother, I will not go; I will die first!"

"Courage, Henri," said Catherine, pressing his hands between her own, "let us inquire into the real reason."

Henri lowered his eyes, as if he dared not let his mother read what was in his heart.

"Is there no other reason," she asked, "less romantic, more reasonable, more public?"

"Mother, it is not my fault if this idea dwells in my mind, and perchance retains a place it should not hold; but have you not said yourself that the horoscope of my brother Charles prophesies that he will die young?"

"Yes," replied Catherine; "but a horoscope may lie, my son. I myself at this moment hope that all horoscopes are not true."

"But did not his horoscope declare this?"

"His horoscope spoke of a quarter of a century, but did not say if it were for his life or for his reign."

"Well, then, dear mother, contrive that I remain; my brother is nearly four-and-twenty, and another year must decide."

Catherine pondered deeply. "Yes, assuredly," she said, "it would be better if it could be so arranged."

"Oh, judge then, my mother," cried Henri, "what despair for me, if I were to exchange the crown of France for the crown of Poland! — to be tormented there with the idea that I might reign at the Louvre in the midst of this lettered and elegant court, near the best mother in the world, whose counsels would save me one half of my fatigue and labors, who, accustomed to bear with my father a portion of the burden of the State, would kindly bear it also with me. Ah, my mother, I should have been a great king!"

"Come, come, my dearest child," said Catherine, to whom this prospect had always been a very sweet hope, "come, do not despair. Have you thought of any way by which this could be arranged?"

"Yes, assuredly; and that is the principal reason why I

returned two or three days before I was expected, making my brother Charles believe that it was for Madame de Condé; then I have formed an acquaintance with Lasco, the principal envoy, doing all that I could to make myself unpopular and disliked, and I hope I have succeeded."

"Ah, my dear son," said Catherine, "that is bad; we must always put the interest of France before your petty dislikes."

"Mother, does the interest of France require, in case of any misfortune happening to my brother Charles, that D'Alençon or the King of Navarre should ascend the throne?"

"Oh, the King of Navarre! Never! never!" murmured Catherine.

"Upon my word!" continued Henri, "my brother D'Alençon is no better, and does not love you more."

"Well," asked Catherine, "and what said Lasco?"

"Lasco hesitated when I pressed him to seek an audience. Oh, if he would write to Poland, and annul the election!"

"Folly, my son; very madness! What a Diet has consecrated is sacred."

"But then, Mother, could not these Poles be induced to accept my brother in my stead?"

"This is difficult, if not impossible."

"Never mind; try. Speak to the king, Mother; ascribe all to my love for Madame de Condé; say I am mad, crazy about her. He saw me, besides, leave the hotel of the prince with Guise, who does me every service in that quarter."

"Yes, in order to make his league; you do not perceive this, but I do."

"Yes, Mother, yes; but in the mean time I make use

of him. Should we not be glad when a man serves us while serving himself?"

"And what said the king when he met you?"

"He seemed to believe what I told him, which was that love only had brought me back to Paris."

"But has he not asked you for any account of the rest of the night?"

"Yes, Mother; but I went to sup at Nantouillet's, where I made a great riot, so that the king might hear of it, and have no suspicion as to where I was."

"Then he knows nothing of your visit to Lasco?"

"Nothing."

"So much the better. I will try, then, to speak for you, my poor boy; but you know the intractable disposition of him with whom I have to deal."

"Charles will not allow me to remain. He detests me."

"He is jealous of you, my beautiful hero! Why are you so brave and fortunate? Why, at scarcely twenty years of age, have you gained battles like Alexander and Cæsar? But do not open your heart to every one. Pretend to be resigned, and pay your court to the king. To-day, even, there is to be a private council for reading and discussing the addresses to be delivered at the ceremony. Act the King of Poland and leave all the rest to me. By the way, how succeeded your expedition of last night?"

"It failed, Mother. The gay gallant was warned, and escaped by the window."

"Some day," said Catherine, "I shall learn who is the bad genius who thus counteracts all my projects. In the mean while, I have my suspicion. Malediction be on him!"

"Then, Mother —" said the Duc d'Anjou.

"Leave me to manage all;" and she kissed Henri tenderly on the eyes and pushed him out of her cabinet.

The princes of the house then arrived. Charles was in a capital humor; for the audacity of his sister Marguerite had rather pleased than vexed him. He felt no resentment against La Mole, and had awaited him with some ardor in the corridor simply because it was a kind of chase. D'Alençon, on the other hand, was much preoccupied. The repulsion he had always felt for La Mole had changed into hate from the moment he knew that he was beloved by his sister. Marguerite was at the same time meditative and alert. She had to remember and to watch. The Polish deputies had sent a copy of the harangues to be pronounced.

Marguerite, to whom no more mention had been made of the occurrences of the previous evening than if they had never taken place, read the discourses; and except Charles, every one discussed what the replies should be. Charles allowed Marguerite to reply as she pleased. He was somewhat difficult in his choice of words for D'Alençon; but as to the discourse of Henri d'Anjou, he attacked it bitterly, and made endless corrections and additions.

This meeting, without having any decisive issue, tended to envenom the feelings of all. Henri d'Anjou, who had to rewrite nearly all his discourse, went out to perform his task. Marguerite, who had not heard of the King of Navarre since he had broken her window-pane, returned to her apartments, in the hope of finding him there. D'Alençon, who had read the hesitation in his brother D'Anjou's eyes, and surprised a meaning look between him and his mother, withdrew to ponder over what might be the fresh plot. Charles was going to his forge to finish a boar-spear he was making for himself, when Catherine stopped him. Expecting some opposition to his will from his mother, he paused, and gazed sternly on her. "Well," said he, "and what now?"

"One other word, Sire; we had forgotten it, and yet it is of much importance. What day do you fix for the public reception?"

"True!" said the king, seating himself; "let us talk it over, Mother. Well, what day shall it be?"

"I thought," replied Catherine, "that in your Majesty's silence, your apparent forgetfulness, there was something of deep calculation."

"Why so, Mother?"

"Because," added the queen-mother, very quietly, "there is no need, my son, as it appears to me, that the Poles should see us crave their crown with such avidity."

"On the contrary, Mother," said Charles, "they have hastened by forced marches from Warsaw hither. Honor for honor, politeness for politeness!"

"Your Majesty may be right in one sense, as in another I am not wrong. Your opinion, then, is, that the public reception should be hastened?"

"Certainly; and is it not yours also?"

"You know that I have no opinions but such as are connected with your glory; I tell you, then, that thus hastening the affair, I should fear that you might be accused of profiting very quickly by this occasion which presents itself for relieving the house of France of the charges which your brother imposes on it, but which assuredly he repays to it in glory and devotion."

"Mother," said Charles, "when my brother leaves France, I will so richly endow him that no one will even dare to think what you fear they may say."

"Well," said Catherine, "I give up, since you have such good answers to all my objections; but to receive this warlike people, who judge of the power of States from exterior signs, you must have a considerable display

of troops ; and I do not think that there are yet enough assembled in the Île de France."

" Excuse me, Mother, but I had foreseen this event, and was prepared for it. I have recalled two battalions from Normandy, one from Guienne ; my company of archers arrived yesterday from Brittany ; the light-horse spread over Lorraine will be in Paris in the course of the day ; and while it is supposed that I can scarcely command four regiments, I have twenty thousand men ready to appear."

" Ah, ah ! " said Catherine, surprised, " then there is only one thing wanting ; but that you will procure."

" What is that ? "

" Money ; I imagine that you have not a super-abundance."

" On the contrary, Madame, on the contrary," said Charles IX., " I have fourteen hundred thousand crowns in the Bastille ; my private estates have this week brought me in eight hundred thousand crowns, which I have buried in my cellars in the Louvre ; and in case of need, Nantouillet has three hundred thousand crowns, besides, at my disposal."

Catherine trembled, for she had before seen Charles violent and passionate, but never provident.

" Well, then," she added, " your Majesty thinks of everything, — admirable ! and if the tailors, embroiderers, and jewellers use despatch, your Majesty will be ready to give this audience in less than six weeks."

" Six weeks ! " exclaimed Charles, " why, Mother, the tailors, embroiderers, and jewellers have been hard at work since the day when my brother's nomination was announced. On a pinch everything might have been ready for to-day ; certainly everything will be ready in three or four days."

"Ah!" murmured Catherine; "you are in greater haste than I thought, my son."

"Honor for honor, as I have already said."

"Good; then it is this honor done to the house of France that flatters you, is it not?"

"Assuredly."

"And to see a son of France on the throne of Poland is your chief desire?"

"Precisely so."

"Then it is the fact and not the man that interests you; and whoever may reign there —"

"No, no, Mother; *corbœuf!* no. Let us be as we are! The Poles have made a good choice; they are skilful, clever fellows! A military nation, a people of soldiers, they take a captain for their ruler. *Peste!* D'Anjou is their man. The hero of Jarnac and Moncontour fits them like a glove. Whom would you have me send them, — D'Alençon? A coward! he would give them a fine idea of the house of Valois! D'Alençon! he would flee at the noise of the first ball that whistled by his ears; while Henri d'Anjou is a warrior bold and tried, always sword in hand, always on the march, on his war-horse or on foot. Forward! cut down, thrust, crush, slay! Ah, he is a man, my brother D'Anjou; a gallant soldier, who 'll give them fighting from morning till night, — from the 1st of January to the 31st of December! He is not a hard drinker, it is true; but he will do his work in cold blood, you see. He will be in his element, the dear Henri! On, on, to the field of battle! bravo, trumpets and drums! Long live the king! Long live the conqueror! Long live the general! They will proclaim him emperor three times a year! This will be admirable for the house of France and the honor of the Valois! he may be killed perchance, but *ventre-mahon!* it will be a glorious death."

Catherine shuddered, and her eyes flashed fire. "Say," she cried, "that you wish to send your brother, Henri d'Anjou, away. Say you do not love your brother."

"Ah, ah, ah!" exclaimed Charles, laughing nervously; "what! have you divined that I wished to send him away? Have you divined that I do not love him? And suppose it were so? Love my brother! why should I love my brother? Ah, ah, ah! do you speak jestingly?" and as he spoke, his pale cheeks were animated with feverish red. "Does he love me? Do you love me? Is there, except my dogs, Marie Touchet, and my nurse, — is there any one who has ever loved me? No, no, I do not love my brother. I love only myself; do you understand? And I do not prevent my brother from doing as I do."

"Sire," said Catherine, becoming animated in her turn, "since you unfold your heart to me, I must open mine to you. You act like a weak king, like an ill-advised king; you send away your brother, the natural support of your throne, who is in all respects fit to succeed you if any misfortune happened to you, leaving, in that event, your crown in jeopardy; for, as you said, D'Alençon is young, incapable, weak, — more than weak, cowardly! — and the Béarnais is waiting in the background!"

"Well, death of all the devils!" cried Charles, "how does it concern me what will happen when I am dead? The Béarnais is waiting in the background, say you? *Corbœuf!* so much the better! I said I loved no one, — I was wrong; I love Henriot, — yes, I love the good Henriot, with his free air and his warm hand, while I see around me none but false eyes, and touch none but ice-cold hands. He is incapable of treason towards me, I will swear! Besides, I owe a recompense; they poisoned his mother, poor fellow, — some persons of my family too, it is said. Besides, I am in good health; but if I fell

sick, I would send for him, and he should not leave my side. I would take nothing but from his hand; and should I die, I would make him King of France and of Navarre, and, *ventre du pape!* instead of laughing at my death, as my brother would do, he would weep, or at least appear to do so."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at Catherine's feet, she would have been less alarmed than at these words. She remained aghast, looking at Charles with a haggard eye; and then, at the end of a few seconds, she cried, "Henri de Navarre! Henri de Navarre King of France, to the prejudice of my children! Ah, *sainte Madone!* we will see! It is for this you would send away my son?"

"Your son! and what then am I, — a son of the wolf, like Romulus?" cried Charles, trembling with rage, and his eye sparkling as if it were on fire. "Your son! You are right; and the King of France, then, is not your son. The King of France has no brothers; the King of France has no mother; the King of France has only subjects! The King of France has no need of sentiment; he has will. He can do without being loved; but he will be obeyed!"

"Sire, you have mistaken my words. I called him my son who is about to leave me. I love him better at this moment because it is he whom at this moment I fear to lose. Is it a crime for a mother to desire that her son should not leave her?"

"And I — I tell you he shall leave you. I tell you he shall leave France and go to Poland, and that in two days; and if you add one word, in one day, — to-morrow. And if you do not bow your head, if you do not change that threatening expression of your eyes, I will strangle him to-night, as you would have strangled your daughter's lover yesternight; only I will not miss him as we did La Mole."

At this threat Catherine bent down her head, and then again instantly raised it. "Ah, poor child!" she said, "your brother would kill you; but be tranquil, your mother will defend you."

"Ah! I am defied!" cried Charles. "Well, then, by the blood of Christ! he shall die, — not this evening, but this very moment. Ah! a weapon! a dagger! a knife! — ah!"

Charles, after having vainly sought all around for what he demanded, saw the small stiletto which his mother wore at her girdle, seized it, drew it from its shagreen and silver case, and rushed out of the chamber, with the determination of striking Henri d'Anjou wherever he found him; but on reaching the vestibule, his over-excited strength gave way suddenly, and extending his arm, he let fall the keen weapon, which stuck in the floor, and uttering a lamentable cry, he swooned and fell on the floor, while the blood spurted copiously from his nose and his mouth.

"Jesus!" he said, "they are killing me! help! help!"

Catherine, who had followed, saw him fall, looked at him for a moment without moving or calling, and then recalled to herself, not by maternal instinct, but by the difficulty of her situation, she opened a door, and cried, "The king is taken ill. Help! help!"

At this cry, a crowd of servants, officers, and courtiers, hastened to the young king; but foremost of all a woman rushed on, pushing aside the crowd, and raised Charles, who was as pale as a corpse.

"They are killing me, Nurse! they are killing me!" murmured the king, bathed in perspiration and blood.

"They are killing you, my Charles?" cried the good creature, looking every one in the face in a way that made even Catherine retreat; "and who is killing you?"

Charles uttered a sigh and fainted.

"Ah!" said the doctor, Ambroise Paré, whom they had sent for; "ah! the king is very ill."

"Now, by choice or by compulsion," said the implacable Catherine to herself, "he must accede to a delay;" and she left the king to go to her second son, who was awaiting in the oratory the result of that interview so important to himself.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOROSCOPE.

On leaving the oratory, where she had informed Henri d'Anjou of what had taken place, Catherine found René in her chamber. She had written to him the evening before, and he had come in response to her letter.

"Well," asked the queen, "have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"How is he?"

"Rather better."

"Can he speak?"

"No, the sword has pierced the larynx."

"I told you to make him write."

"I tried, but his hand had formed only two letters, almost illegible, when he fainted; the jugular vein has been cut into, and the loss of blood has greatly weakened him."

"Have you seen these letters?"

"Here they are."

René took a paper from his pocket, and presented it to the queen, who hastily opened it.

"An *m* and an *o*," said she. "Can it be, after all, M. de la Mole, and that the confession of Marguerite was only to avert suspicion?"

"Madame," returned René, "if I may venture an opinion, I should say that M. de la Mole is too much in love to trouble his head about politics, and, above all, too much in

love with Madame Marguerite to serve her husband very devotedly, — for there is no deep love without jealousy."

"You think him in love, then?"

"Desperately."

"Has he had recourse to you?"

"Yes; I made him a waxen image."

"Pierced to the heart?"

"To the heart."

"Have you it still?"

"At my house."

"I wonder," said Catherine, "if these cabalistic preparations have really the power attributed to them?"

"Your Majesty knows even more than I what their influence is."

"Does Marguerite love La Mole?"

"Sufficiently to ruin herself for him. Yesterday she saved him at the risk of her honor and her life; you see all this, and yet you doubt."

"Doubt what?"

"Science."

"I doubt because science has deceived me," looking fixedly at René.

"On what occasion?"

"Oh! you know what I mean, — unless, perchance, it is the scholar and not the science."

"I don't know what you mean, Madame," replied the Florentine.

"René, have your perfumes lost their odor?"

"No, Madame,—not when they are employed by me; but it is possible that in passing through the hands of others —"

Catherine smiled and shook her head. "Your opiate has done wonders, René," she said; "Madame de Sauve's lips are fresher and redder than ever."

"That must not be attributed to my opiate, Madame,

for the Baronne de Sauve, availing herself of a pretty woman's right to be capricious, did not speak to me again about that opiate; and after the suggestion your Majesty made to me, I concluded not to send it to her. The boxes, therefore, are all in my house, just as you left them, — except one which has disappeared without my knowing what person took it, or what that person intended to do with it."

"Well, well," said Catherine, "we will speak of that some other time. Tell me what is necessary to arrive at an idea of the probable length of a person's life?"

"To know first the day of his birth, his age, and what constellation he was born under."

"Next?"

"To have some of his blood and hair."

"If I bring you some of his blood and tell you his age, can you tell me the probable time of his death?"

"Yes, within a few days."

"I have his hair, and I will procure some of his blood."

"Was he born in the day, or during the night?"

"At twenty-three minutes past five in the evening."

"Be with me to-morrow at five o'clock; the experiment must be made at the precise hour of the birth."

"Good!" said Catherine. "We will be there."

René saluted, and retired without appearing to notice the "we," which indicated that contrary to her custom the queen would not come alone.

The next morning, at daybreak, Catherine entered her son Charles's apartments; she had inquired after him at midnight, and was informed that Maître Ambroise Paré was with him, and intended bleeding him if the same nervous agitation continued. Shuddering even in his slumbers, pale from loss of blood, Charles slept, his head

resting on his faithful nurse's shoulder, who, leaning against the bed, had not changed her position for three hours, fearing to disturb him. Catherine asked if her son had not been bled. The nurse replied that he had, and so abundantly that he had twice fainted.

The blood was in a basin in the adjoining room. Catherine entered under pretence of examining it, and while so doing she filled with it a phial she had brought with her for the purpose; then she returned, hiding her red fingers, that would otherwise have betrayed her, in her pockets. As she reappeared, Charles opened his eyes and perceived his mother; then, recollecting the events of the previous evening, "Ah! it is you, Madame," said he; "well, you may tell your dear son, your Henri d'Anjou, that it will be to-morrow."

"It shall be when you please, my dear Charles; compose yourself, and go to sleep."

Charles closed his eyes, and Catherine left the room; but no sooner had she gone out than Charles, raising himself, cried, "Send for the chancellor, the court! I want them all!"

The nurse replaced his head upon her shoulder, and sought to lull him to sleep.

"No, no, Nurse!" said he, "I shall not sleep any more. Summon my people; I wish to work to-day."

When Charles spoke thus no one dared to disobey, and even the nurse, spite of the privileges she enjoyed, did not venture to dispute his orders. The chancellor was summoned and the audience was appointed, not for the morrow, which was impossible, but for the fifth day from that time.

At five o'clock the queen and the Duc d'Anjou proceeded to René's, who, in expectation of their visit, had prepared everything for the experiment. In the chamber on the right, — that is, in the chamber of sacrifice, — a

blade of steel, covered with singular arabesques, was heating in a brazier of charcoal. On the altar lay the book of fate; and as the previous night had been very clear, René had been enabled to consult the stars.

Henri d'Anjou entered first. He had false hair, and his face and figure were concealed beneath a mask and large cloak. His mother followed him, and had she not known in advance that it was her son who awaited her there, she would not have recognized him. The queen took off her mask; D'Anjou, however, did not follow her example.

"Have you consulted the stars?" asked Catherine.

"I have, Madame, and they have already informed me of the past. The person whose fate you desire to know has, like all persons born under Cancer, a fiery and ardent disposition. He is powerful; he has lived nearly a quarter of a century; Heaven has granted him wealth and power. Is it not so, Madame?"

"Perhaps."

"Have you his hair and blood?"

"Here they are."

And Catherine gave the magician a lock of fair hair and a small phial of blood.

René took the phial, shook it, and let fall on the glowing steel blade a large drop of blood that boiled for a second, and then spread itself into a thousand fantastic shapes.

"Oh!" cried René, "I see him convulsed with agony! Hark! how he groans, how he calls for help! See how all around him turns to blood! See how, around his death-bed, combats and wars arise! And see, here are the lances and swords!"

"Will this be long delayed?" asked Catherine, seizing the hand of her son, who, in his anxiety to see, had leaned over the brazier.

René approached the altar, and repeated a cabalistic prayer; then he rose, and announcing that all was ready, took in one hand the phial and in the other the lock of hair, and bidding Catherine open at hazard the book of fate, he poured on the steel blade all the blood, and cast the hair in the fire, pronouncing a mystic formula as he did so.

Instantly the Duc d'Anjou and Catherine saw on the blade a figure resembling a corpse wrapped in a winding-sheet. Another figure, that of a woman, leaned over it. At the same time the hair burned, casting out one jet of flame like a fiery tongue.

"A year," cried René, "scarce a year, and this man shall die! One woman alone shall lament over him; and yet, no, — at the end of the blade is another woman, with an infant in her arms."

Catherine looked at her son, as if though herself the mother of the man whose death was announced, she would ask him who these two women could be. But scarcely had René finished when the forms disappeared. Then Catherine opened the book at hazard, and read with a voice that trembled in spite of herself the following distich: —

"Ains a peri cil que l'on redoutoit,
Plus tôt, trop tôt, si prudence n'étoit."

"And for him that you wot of," said Catherine, "what say the signs for this month?"

"Favorable as ever; unless Providence interpose to thwart his destiny, he is sure to be fortunate, but — "

"But what?"

"One of the stars composing his pleiad was covered by a black cloud during my observations."

"Ah, a black cloud! there is then some hope?"

"Of whom speak you, Madame?" asked D'Anjou.

Catherine drew her son away from the light of the brazier, and spoke to him in a low voice. During this interval, René, kneeling by the brazier, poured into the hollow of his hand one last drop of blood remaining at the bottom of the phial.

"Strange contradiction!" murmured he, "which proves how little can human knowledge compete with ours. To every one but me, even to Ambroise Paré, this blood, so pure, so full of health, promises years of life; and yet all that vigor will soon depart, all that life will be extinguished within a year."

Catherine and Henri turned and listened. The eyes of the prince shone through his mask.

"Ah!" continued René, "to the uninitiated the present is manifest, but to us the future is also manifest."

"He will die, then, before the year be over?" said the queen-mother.

"As surely as there are three persons present who must one day repose in the grave."

"Yet you say the blood indicates a long life?"

"Yes, if things were to follow the natural course; but an accident —"

"Ah, yes, you hear," whispered Catherine to Henri; "an accident."

"Alas!" said he, "the greater reason for staying."

"Oh! as to that, think of it no longer, it is impossible."

"Thanks," said the young man, turning to René, and disguising the tone of his voice; "take this purse."

"Come, *Count*," said Catherine, purposely using this title, to divert René's suspicions. And they left the chamber.

"Mother," cried Henri, "you hear? — an accident. Should it happen, I shall be four hundred leagues away."

"Four hundred leagues may be accomplished in eight days."

"Yes; but who knows if they will suffer me to return?"

"Perhaps," replied the queen, "this illness of the king's is the accident of which René spoke. Go, Henri, go, and beware of irritating your brother, should you see him."

CHAPTER XI.

MUTUAL CONFIDENCES.

The first thing the Duc d'Anjou learned on reaching the Louvre was that the solemn entry of the ambassadors was fixed for the fifth day. The tailors and jewellers waited on the prince with magnificent dresses and superb ornaments which the king had ordered for him.

While he fitted them on with an anger that brought tears to his eyes, Henri de Navarre was adorning himself with a splendid collar of emeralds, a gold-hilted sword, and a very valuable ring, which Charles had sent him that morning. D'Alençon had just received a letter, and had retired to his chamber, in order to read it at his leisure.

As to Coconnas, he was asking for his friend from every echo in the Louvre. Although not much surprised at La Mole's absence through the night, he had begun in the morning to feel somewhat uneasy about him; and he had started out to search for him, beginning at the Belle Étoile, going thence to the Rue Cloche Percée, to the Rue Tizon, to the Pont St. Michel, and so back to the Louvre. That search had been conducted in a manner sometimes so original, sometimes so imperative, — as may easily be conceived, when one considers the eccentric character of Coconnas, — that it had occasioned between him and three noblemen of the court explanations, which were ended, after the fashion of the period, on the duelling-ground.

Coconnas had entered upon these encounters with as much zeal as he usually gave to affairs of that sort. He had killed the first adversary and wounded the two others, saying, "That poor La Mole! he knew Latin so well!" so that the last man of the three, Baron de Boissey, had said as he fell, "Ah, for the love of Heaven, Coconnas, vary a little; say at least that he knew Greek."

At length a rumor of the affair in the corridor began to be bruited about. Coconnas was in the utmost grief; for a moment he believed that all these kings and princes had killed his friend and thrown his body into some dungeon. He learned that D'Alençon had been of the party, and overlooking the dignity that encompassed a prince of the blood, he went to him to demand an explanation, with as little ceremony as if he had been a private gentleman.

D'Alençon, at first, was inclined to show to the door an impertinent who came to ask an account of his actions; but Coconnas spoke so sternly, his eyes were so flaming with rage, and the adventure of three duels in less than twenty-four hours had placed the Piedmontese so high that the duke paused, and instead of giving way to his first impulse, replied with a charming smile, "My dear Coconnas, it is true that the king, furious at having received on his shoulder a silver ewer, the Duc d'Anjou, angry at having orange-jam poured on his head, and the Duc de Guise, humiliated by having been assailed with a haunch of venison, combined to kill M. de la Mole; but a friend of your friend's averted the blow, and I assure you the enterprise failed."

"Ah," said Coconnas, breathing as loudly at this information as a smith's bellows; "ah, *mordi!* Monseigneur, that is well; and I should like to know this friend, to prove my gratitude."

D'Alençon made no reply, but smiled more agreeably still, which made Coconnas believe that this friend was none other than the prince himself.

"Well, Monseigneur," he continued, "since you have done so much as to tell me the beginning of this story, will you complete the obligation by relating to me the conclusion? They wished to kill him, but did not kill him, you say; very well, what did they do with him? I am brave; come, tell me. I know how to support bad news. They have thrown him into some dungeon, have they not? So much the better; it will teach him prudence. He is never willing to take my advice. And besides, we will get him out, *mordi!* stones are not hard to every one."

D'Alençon shook his head. "The worst of all," he said, "my brave Coconnas, is that since that adventure your friend has not been seen, and no one knows where he went."

"*Mordi!*" cried the Piedmontese, again turning pale, "but I will know where he is, even if he has gone to hell!"

"Go to the Queen Marguerite," said D'Alençon, who was as anxious as Coconnas to learn where La Mole was; "she will know what has become of the friend you lament."

"I had already thought of doing so," replied Coconnas, "but did not dare; for besides the fact that Madame Marguerite impresses me more than I can tell, I was afraid of finding her in tears. But since your Highness assures me that La Mole is not dead, and that her Majesty will know where he is, I will muster up courage and go to her."

"Go, my friend, go," said Duc François; "and when you have gained information pass it over to me; for I

am really as anxious as you are. Only bear in mind one thing, Coconnas."

"What is it?"

"Do not say it was by my advice; for if you are so imprudent, you may not obtain any information."

"Monseigneur," said Coconnas, "as your royal Highness recommends me to secrecy on this point, I will be as mute as a tench, or the queen-mother. Good prince! excellent prince! magnanimous prince!" he murmured, as he went to the Queen of Navarre.

Marguerite was awaiting Coconnas; for the noise of his despair had reached her, and on learning by what exploits his despair had been manifested, she almost forgave him his somewhat coarse behavior to Madame de Nevers, whom the Piedmontese had not visited, in consequence of a dispute between them two or three days previously. He was therefore introduced to the queen as soon as announced.

Coconnas entered, not altogether able to surmount the embarrassment which he had told D'Alençon he always felt in the presence of the queen, and which was occasioned more by the superiority of her intelligence than by that of her rank; but Marguerite greeted him with a smile which instantly reassured him.

"Ah, Madame!" he exclaimed, "restore my friend to me, I entreat you; or at least tell me what has become of him, for without him I cannot live. Suppose Euryalus without Nisus, Damon without Pythias, or Orestes without Pylades, and have pity on my misfortune at the loss of my dear friend."

Marguerite smiled, and after having bound Coconnas to secrecy, told him all about the escape by the window. As to the place of his concealment, although Coconnas urged her to reveal it with all earnestness, she decidedly refused.

That only half satisfied Coconnas; he therefore had recourse to the diplomatic tentatives practised in a higher sphere. The result was that Marguerite clearly perceived that the Duc d'Alençon shared in the desire of his gentleman to know what had become of La Mole.

"Well," said the queen, "if you wish to learn something positive as to your friend, ask the King of Navarre, who is the only person who has a right to speak. As for me, all I can tell you is that he you are seeking lives; have faith in my word!"

"I have faith in something still more sure, Madame; those lovely eyes have not been weeping."

Then, thinking he could not add anything to a saying that had the double advantage of conveying his thought, and of expressing his high opinion of La Mole's merit, he retired, meditating a reconciliation with Madame de Nevers, not on her account, but simply to learn from her what he had been unable to learn from Marguerite.

Great griefs are abnormal experiences, the burden of which the mind shakes off as soon as possible. The idea of leaving Marguerite had almost broken La Mole's heart; and it was rather to save the reputation of the queen than to preserve his own life that he had consented to fly. And therefore the next day he had returned to Paris, to see Marguerite at her balcony. Marguerite, on her side, as if a secret voice had informed her that he would be there, had passed the evening at her window; and thus they had seen each other with that indescribable happiness which accompanies forbidden pleasures. There was even more; the melancholy and romantic disposition of La Mole found a certain charm in his misfortune. Nevertheless, as a lover truly devoted is happy only when he sees or possesses, and suffers through all the time of absence, La Mole, eager to revisit Marguerite, occupied

himself in organizing with all possible despatch the event which would restore her to him; namely, the flight of the King of Navarre.

Marguerite, having thus seen La Mole, and being aware of his safety, was at ease with respect to him, but fearing that he might be watched and followed, she pertinaciously refused to give him any other meeting than these *à l'Espagnole*, which took place every evening until the night before the reception of the ambassadors. On this evening, about nine o'clock, when all the persons in the Louvre were preoccupied with the preparations for next day, Marguerite opened her window and went into the balcony; but scarcely was she there when the note she expected, according to La Mole's usual custom, was thrown with his usual skill, and fell at the feet of his royal mistress. As he had generally awaited her missive, Marguerite understood by his anticipating her that he had some important intelligence to communicate; and she read the note with all haste. On the first page it contained these words: —

Madame, — I must speak to the King of Navarre; it is on a most urgent matter. I am waiting.

And on the second page, which could be detached from the other, was written: —

My Lady and Queen, — Manage that I may give you one of those kisses that I send you. I am waiting.

Marguerite had scarcely finished the second side of this letter when she heard the voice of Henri de Navarre, who, with his usual reserve, tapped at the door and asked Gillonne if he might be allowed to enter. The queen instantly divided the sheet of paper, put one of the pages in her bosom and the other in her pocket, ran to the window, which she shut, and going quickly to the door, said, "Come in, Sire."

Gently, quickly, and cleverly as Marguerite had closed the window, the sound had reached the ears of Henri, whose senses were always on the alert, and who had in the society he so much mistrusted acquired that exquisite delicacy of hearing and sight possessed by men living in a savage state. But the King of Navarre was not one of those tyrants who wish to prevent their wives from taking the air and gazing at the stars. He was smiling and urbane as usual.

"Madame," he said, "while our people of the court are trying on their fine apparel, I have come to have a few words with you as to my affairs, which you still regard as your own, do you not?"

"Most assuredly, Monsieur," replied Marguerite; "are not our interests always identical?"

"Yes, Madame; and therefore I wished to ask your opinion as to the effort which D'Alençon has made for several days to avoid me, and which he has carried so far that since the day before yesterday he has betaken himself to St. Germain. Do you not think from this that it is his intention either to go away alone, or not to go at all? Let me, if you please, have your ideas on this point; for it would have great weight with me if your opinion should coincide with mine."

"Your Majesty is quite right to feel uneasy as to my brother's silence. I have thought of it all day; and it is my opinion that, circumstances having changed, he has changed with them."

"That is to say, that seeing King Charles ill, and the Duc d'Anjou King of Poland, he would not be sorry to remain in Paris to watch for the crown of France."

"Precisely so."

"I agree with you. This is all as I wish it," continued Henri. "Let him remain; but that entirely changes our

plan, — for I require, to go alone, thrice the guarantees I should have asked had your brother accompanied me, whose name and presence in the enterprise would have been my safeguards. The only thing that astonishes me is not having any tidings of Mouy. It is not like him to remain so long without stirring. Have you any intelligence of him, Madame?"

"I, Sire!" said Marguerite, astonished. "How could I possibly —"

"Eh, *pardieu*, my dear, nothing can be more natural. You were so kind as to oblige me by saving young La Mole's life. He was sure to go to Mantes; and if one can go thither he certainly can return."

"Ah! that gives me the solution to a riddle the meaning of which I have sought for in vain," replied Marguerite. "I had left my window open, and found on my return a kind of note on the carpet."

"There, now!" said Henri.

"A note which at first I could not comprehend, and to which I attached no importance," continued Marguerite. "Perhaps I was wrong, and it comes from that quarter."

"Very possible," said Henri; "I would even venture to say that it is probable. Might I see this note?"

"Certainly, Sire," replied Marguerite, handing to the king the half-sheet of paper which she had put in her pocket.

The king looked at it. "Is not this," he asked, "the writing of M. de la Mole?"

"I do not know," was Marguerite's reply; "the writing appears to me disguised."

"Never mind; let us read." And he read: —

MADAME, — I must speak to the King of Navarre; it is on a most urgent matter. I am waiting.

"Ah, do you see?" said Henri; "he says he is waiting!"

"Yes, I see he says so; but what then?"

"Why, *ventre-saint-gris!* I wish him to come here."

"Come here!" exclaimed Marguerite, fixing on her husband her beautiful eyes, full of amazement; "how can you say such a thing, Sire? A man whom the king has sought to kill, who is marked down, menaced! Let him come, do you say! Is that possible? Were doors made for those who have been —"

"Obliged to escape by the window, you would say."

"Precisely so; you complete my thought."

"Well, but if they know the way by the window, they may take that road again, since it is impossible for them to enter by the door. That is simple enough, surely."

"Do you think so?" said Marguerite, blushing with pleasure at the thought of again having La Mole near her.

"I am sure of it."

"But how can he ascend?" inquired the queen.

"Did you not preserve the rope-ladder I sent you?"

"Yes, Sire," said Marguerite.

"Then the whole thing will be capitally managed. Fasten it to your balcony, and let it hang. If it be Mouy who awaits — and I am inclined to think it is — he will mount the ladder." And without losing his gravity, Henri took the taper to light Marguerite in her search for the ladder. The search was not of long duration; the ladder was discovered in a cupboard in the famous cabinet.

"Here it is," said Henri. "And now, Madame, if it is not too much to ask of your complaisance, tie it, I beg, to the balcony."

"Why I and not you, Sire?" asked Marguerite.

"Because the best conspirators are the most prudent;

the sight of a man might alarm your correspondent, you see."

Marguerite smiled, and fastened the ladder.

"There," said Henri, ensconcing himself in a corner of the apartment; "show yourself plainly; now let the ladder be dropped. Capital! I am sure Mouy will come up."

In fact, ten minutes later, a man intoxicated with joy placed his leg over the balcony; but seeing that the queen did not approach him, he remained for some moments in hesitation, and then Henri advanced.

"Ah!" said he, urbanely, "it is not Mouy; it is M. de la Mole. Good-evening, M. de la Mole. Enter, I entreat you."

La Mole was for a moment stupefied. Perchance, had he still been on the ladder, instead of having his feet firmly on the balcony, he would have fallen backwards.

"You desired to speak to the King of Navarre on an urgent affair," said Marguerite; "I have informed him, and here he is."

Henri went to the window, and closed it.

"I love thee!" whispered Marguerite, pressing the young man's hand ardently.

"Well, Monsieur," said Henri, handing a chair to La Mole, "what have we to say?"

"I have to say, Sire," he replied, "that I have left M. de Mouy at the barrier. He desires to know if Maurevel has spoken, and if his presence in your Majesty's chamber is known."

"Not yet; but it must be before long. We must therefore make haste."

"His opinion coincides with your Majesty's, Sire; and if to-morrow, during the evening, M. d'Alençon is ready to depart, Mouy will be at the Porte St. Marcel with a

hundred and fifty men; five hundred will await you at Fontainebleau, and then you will gain Blois, Angoulême, and Bordeaux."

"Madame," said Henri, turning to his wife, "to-morrow I shall be ready; shall you?"

La Mole's eyes were fixed on Marguerite's with intense anxiety.

"You have my word," replied the queen. "Whithersoever you go, I follow you; but you know M. d'Alençon must go at the same time. There is no middle path for him: he is with us, or he betrays us; if he hesitates, we will not stir."

"Does he know anything of this proposed plan, M. de la Mole?" inquired Henri.

"He had a letter from Mouy several days since."

"Ah, ah!" said Henri, "and never mentioned it to me!"

"Be on your guard, Monsieur; be on your guard!" said Marguerite.

"Be easy; I am on my guard. But how to return an answer to Mouy?"

"Do not be under any anxiety, Sire. To-morrow, on the right hand or left hand of your Majesty, visible or invisible, during the reception of the ambassadors, he will be there; one word in the queen's address will make him understand whether you consent or not, — whether he should flee, or await you. If the Duc d'Alençon refuses, he requires a delay of only a fortnight to reorganize everything in your name."

"Really," replied Henri, "Mouy is an invaluable man. Can you introduce the expected phrase in your discourse, Madame?"

"Nothing easier," replied Marguerite.

"Well, then," said Henri, "I shall see M. d'Alençon

to-morrow; let Mouy be at his post, and understand from half a word."

"He will be there, Sire."

"Well, then, M. de la Mole, go and bear him my reply. You have, doubtless, a horse and servant somewhere near at hand."

"Orthon awaits me on the quay."

"Go to him, Count. Oh, not by the window! that is very well on extreme occasions; but you might be seen, and as it would not be known that it was for me that you exposed yourself, it would compromise the queen."

"But how then, Sire?"

"If you could not enter the Louvre alone, you can at least go out of it with me, who have the pass-word. You have your cloak, I have mine; we will wrap ourselves up well, and shall pass the wicket without difficulty. Besides, I shall be glad to give Orthon certain instructions. Wait here while I see if the corridors are free."

Henri, with the most natural air in the world, went out to examine if the way was clear. La Mole remained alone with the queen. "Oh, when shall we meet again?" said he.

"To-morrow evening, if we flee; an evening soon in the Rue Cloche Percée, if we do not flee."

"M. de la Mole," said Henri, returning, "you may come; there is no one there."

La Mole bowed respectfully before the queen.

"Give him your hand to kiss, Madame," said Henri; "M. de la Mole is no common servitor."

Marguerite obeyed.

"By the way," added Henri, "put away the rope-ladder carefully; it is a very precious instrument for conspirators, and at the moment we least think of it may be useful. Come, M. de la Mole, come!"

Felix Oudart

CHAPTER XII.

THE AMBASSADORS.

Next morning the whole population of Paris poured towards the Faubourg St. Antoine, by which it was decided that the Polish ambassadors should enter; a line of soldiers restrained the crowd, and a regiment of horse escorted the nobles and ladies of the court.

Soon appeared, close by the Abbey St. Antoine, a troop of cavaliers dressed in red and yellow, with furred mantles and caps, and bearing large sabres curved like Turkish cimeters. Behind this troop came a second, clothed with Oriental magnificence. They preceded the ambassadors, who, four in number, gorgeously sustained the reputation of their chivalrous country.

One of the ambassadors was the Bishop of Cracow; his costume was half-ecclesiastical, half-military, resplendent with gold and jewels. Next the bishop rode the Palatine Lasco, a powerful noble, nearly related to the royal family, rich as a king, and as proud. Behind these two principal ambassadors, who were accompanied by two other palatines of high rank, came a number of gentlemen, whose steeds, all glittering with gold and precious stones, excited the clamorous admiration of the populace. In fact, the French horsemen, notwithstanding the richness of their appointments, were completely eclipsed by these visitors whom they disdainfully regarded as barbarians.

Up to the last moment Catherine had hoped that the reception would be deferred and that the decision of the

king would yield to his weakness, which still continued. But when the day arrived, when she saw Charles, pale as a spectre, assume the royal robes, she saw that she must in appearance at least yield to his iron will, and began to believe that the safest plan for Henri d'Anjou was to depart into the splendid exile to which he was condemned.

Charles, except for the few words he had spoken when on opening his eyes he had seen his mother coming from the cabinet, had not spoken to Catherine since the scene which had led up to the crisis which had broken him down. Every one in the Louvre knew that there had been a terrible quarrel, without knowing the occasion of it; and the boldest among them trembled before that coldness and that silence as birds tremble in the threatening calm which precedes the storm.

The large reception-chamber had been prepared; and as such ceremonies were usually public, the guards and sentinels had received orders to admit as many persons into the apartments and courts as they could possibly contain.

As for Paris, it presented the same aspect that every great city presents on similar occasions, — that is, confusion and curiosity; only, had any one attentively examined the population, he would have remarked a considerable number of men in cloaks, who exchanged glances and signs when at a distance, and when they met, a few rapid words in a low tone. They seemed much occupied with the procession, following it closely, in advance of the rest; and they apparently received their orders from an old man whose keen black eyes, spite of his long white beard and grizzly eyebrows, bespoke a vigorous activity. This old man, either by his own efforts or by his followers' assistance, gained an entrance to the Louvre; and thanks to the commander of the Swiss guard, — a

worthy Huguenot, hardly turned Catholic in spite of his conversion, — obtained a place behind the ambassadors, and opposite Henri and Marguerite.

Henri, informed by La Mole that Mouy in some disguise would be present, looked round on every side. At last his eyes encountered those of the old man, and remained fixed on him. A sign from Mouy put an end to Henri's uncertainties, for Mouy was so well disguised that the King of Navarre himself could hardly believe that this old man with a white beard was the intrepid Huguenot chief who a few days before had made so desperate a defence.

A word from Henri fixed Marguerite's attention on Mouy. Then her beautiful eyes wandered round the chamber in search of La Mole. La Mole was not there.

The delivery of the addresses was begun. The first was to the king; Lasco, in the name of the Diet of Poland, demanded his consent that the crown of Poland should be offered to a prince of the house of France.

The king responded with an acquiescence short and to the point, — presenting to them the Duc d'Anjou, of whose courage he made a high eulogium. He spoke in French, and an interpreter translated what he said at the end of each sentence. While the interpreter took his turn, the king might have been seen touching his lips with a handkerchief, which thus became tinged with blood.

When Charles had finished, Lasco turned to D'Anjou, and offered him the throne in the name of the Polish nation. Lasco's address was in Latin.

The duke replied in the same language, and in a voice he in vain strove to render firm, that he gratefully accepted the honor offered to him. During all this time Charles, who remained standing, with lips compressed,

fixed his eyes on him, motionless and threatening, like the eyes of an eagle.

When the duke had finished, Lasco took the crown of the Jagellons from the velvet cushion on which it rested, and while two Polish nobles invested the duke with the royal robe, he placed the crown in Charles's hands. Charles signed to his brother. D'Anjou knelt before him, and with his own hands Charles placed the crown on his head; and the two brothers interchanged a kiss full of bitter hate.

A herald then cried, "Alexandre Édouard Henri de France, Duc d'Anjou, is crowned King of Poland. God save the King of Poland!" All the assembly repeated, "God save the King of Poland!"

Then Lasco turned to Marguerite. The address of the beautiful queen had been reserved for the last. Now, as this was a courtesy accorded to her to bring out more brilliantly her fine genius, as it was called, every one was prepared to give special attention to that response, which was to be in Latin. We have seen that Marguerite had prepared it herself.

Lasco's address was rather a eulogy than an oration. He had yielded, Sarmatian as he was, to the admiration with which the beautiful Queen of Navarre inspired all hearts; and borrowing the language of Ovid and the style of Ronsard, he said that starting from Warsaw in the middle of a dark night, he and his companions could not have found their way if there had not been two stars which guided them, as the Magian kings were guided, — stars which appeared more and more brilliant as they came nearer to France, and which they now discovered to be the two beautiful eyes of the Queen of Navarre. Finally, passing from the Gospel to the Koran, from Syria to Arabia Petræa, from Nazareth to Mecca, he closed by say-

ing that he was quite ready to do as the ardent disciples of the prophet had done, who, having once had the happiness of looking upon his tomb, destroyed their eyes, — thinking that after enjoying so fair a sight they would find nothing else in the world worthy of admiration. His discourse was applauded by all, — by those who understood Latin, because they shared the opinion of the orator; by those who did not understand it, because they wished it to appear as if they did.

Marguerite, having made a gracious inclination to the ambassador, fixed her eyes on Mouy, and began thus: "Quod nunc hâc in aulâ insperati adestis exultaremus ego et conjux, nisi ideo immineret calamitas, scilicet non solum fratris, sed etiam amici orbitas." ("Your unlooked-for presence in this court would overwhelm my husband and myself with joy, did it not threaten us with a great misfortune; that is, not only the loss of a brother, but also that of a friend.")

These words had a double meaning, and while intended for Mouy, were supposed to refer to the Duc d'Anjou. The latter, accordingly, bowed in token of acknowledgment. Charles did not recollect having read this sentence in Marguerite's speech when submitted to him some days before, but he attached no great importance to the words of Marguerite in a speech of simple courtesy; and, besides, he understood Latin very imperfectly.

Marguerite continued: "Adeo dolemur a te dividi ut tecum proficisci maluissemus; sed idem fatum quo nunc sine ullâ morâ Lutetiâ cedere juberis, hâc in urbe detinet. Proficiscere ergo, frater; proficiscere, amice; proficiscere sine nobis; proficiscentem, sequuntur spes et desideria nostra." ("We are grieved to be separated from you, for we should have preferred going with you; but the same fate that compels you to quit Paris without delay, retains

us in that city. Go, dear brother; go, then, dear friend, — go without us. Our hopes and our wishes follow you.")

It is easy to understand how attentively Mouy had listened to these words, which though addressed to the Duc d'Anjou were meant for him alone. Henri had indeed already turned his head negatively two or three times as a sign to the young Huguenot that D'Alençon had refused; but that movement, which might be the effect of chance, would have seemed to Mouy an insufficient indication had it not been confirmed by Marguerite's words. Now, while he looked at Marguerite and listened to her with all his soul, his black eyes shone so brightly under their gray brows as to arrest Catherine's attention, who started as if struck by an electric shock, and continued looking in that direction.

"That is a strange face," she murmured, as she continued to retain the ceremonial expression on her face. "Who can this man be who watches Marguerite so attentively, and whom Henri and Marguerite, on their part, look at with such earnestness?"

The Queen of Navarre continued her discourse, which from that point was a response to the courteous expressions of the Polish envoy. While Catherine strove in vain to divine the name of this strange old man, the master of the ceremonies came behind her, and presented to her a little satin bag; she opened it, and found a paper containing these words: —

"Maurevel, by the aid of a cordial I have administered to him, has in some measure recovered his strength, and has written the name of the man in the King of Navarre's chamber. This man was M. de Mouy."

"Mouy!" murmured the queen, "I thought it was he. But this old man — eh, *cospetto!* — this old man is —"

Catherine remained with her eyes fixed and her mouth open. Then, leaning towards the ear of the captain of the guards, who was by her side, "Look, M. de Nancey," she said; "look, but without seeming to do so. See Seigneur Lasco, the man who is speaking at this moment. Behind him do you see an old man with a white beard and dressed in black velvet?"

"Yes, Madame," replied the captain.

"Good; do not lose sight of him."

"He to whom the King of Navarre made a sign?"

"Yes; station yourself at the door with ten men, and when he comes out, invite him, in the king's name, to dinner. If he accept, conduct him to a chamber, and keep him prisoner; if he resist, seize him, dead or alive. Go! go!"

Fortunately, Henri, but little interested in Marguerite's address, had his eyes fixed on Catherine, and had not lost a single expression of her face. On seeing her look so steadily and so implacably at Mouy, he became uneasy; on seeing her give an order to the captain of the guards, he understood the whole matter. It was then that he made the sign which Nancey had observed, and which meant, "Save yourself; you are discovered!" Mouy comprehended the meaning of that gesture, which continued so fittingly the portion of Marguerite's discourse which had been addressed to him. He did not wait for the sign to be repeated; he mingled with the crowd and disappeared. But Henri was not quite reassured until Nancey returned, and he saw by Catherine's face that the officer had been unsuccessful.

The audience was finished. The king rose with difficulty, saluted the ambassadors, and retired, leaning on Ambroise Paré, who had been with him since his accident. Catherine, pale with rage, and Henri, silent with grief,

followed him. As to the Duc d'Alençon, he had been completely effaced during the ceremony; and Charles's eyes, which had been fixed on D'Anjou, had not once been turned towards him.

The new King of Poland felt himself lost. Carried off by those barbarians, far from his mother, he was like Antæus, that son of the Earth, who lost his strength when lifted in the arms of Hercules. Once beyond the frontier, he regarded himself as forever shut out from the throne of France. Instead of following the king, he retired to his mother's apartments. He found her not less gloomy and preoccupied than he was himself; for she was thinking of that fine head and mocking face which had been continually in her sight during the ceremony, — of that Béarnais for whom Destiny seemed to make room by sweeping away before him kings, royal assassins, enemies, and obstacles.

On seeing her much-loved son, pale under his crown, crushed under his royal mantle, silently joining in supplication his beautiful hands which he had inherited from her, Catherine rose and went to him.

"Oh, Mother!" cried the king, "I am condemned to die in exile."

"My son," returned Catherine, "have you so soon forgotten René's prediction? Tranquillize yourself; you will not be there long."

"Mother, I entreat you," said the Duc d'Anjou, "on the least probability of the crown of France being vacant, inform me."

"My son," replied the queen, "until the day we both of us await, a horse shall be always saddled in my stable, and a courier ever in my antechamber ready to set out for Poland."

CHAPTER XIII.

ORESTES AND PYLADES.

Henri d'Anjou having departed, peace and happiness seemed to have returned to the Louvre. Charles, laying aside his melancholy, recovered his vigorous health, either hunting each day with Henri, or if prevented from following that sport, passing the time in discussing subjects relating to it, and scolding his brother-in-law for the indifference he betrayed for hawking, declaring that he would be the most accomplished prince of his time, if he did but understand the management of falcons, gerfalcons, hawks, and tiercelets, as well as he did that of brocks and hounds. Catherine had returned to all the duties of a good mother. Kind and gentle towards Charles and D'Alençon, affectionate to Henri and Marguerite, gracious to Madame de Nevers and Madame de Sauve, she even carried her amiability so far as to visit Maurevel twice during the time he lay ill at his residence, situated in the Rue de la Cerisaie, — on the pretext that he had been wounded while fulfilling her orders. Marguerite followed up her love-affairs *à l'Espagnole*. Every evening she stood at her open window, and both by writing and gestures kept up a continual correspondence with La Mole; while in each of his letters the impatient young man reminded his lovely mistress of her promise to see him in the Rue Cloche Percée.

There was but one lonely and discontented person in the Louvre, now become so calm and tranquil. That person was our friend Comte Annibal de Coconnas.

It was certainly something to know that La Mole still lived; it was much to continue to be favored by Madame de Nevers, the gayest and most fanciful of women. But all the happiness of the intimacy granted by the beautiful duchess, all the peace of mind which he gained from Marguerite in regard to the fortunes of their friend, were to the Piedmontese not equal to an hour with La Mole at La Hurière's inn before a pot of sweet wine, or indeed to one of those adventurous excursions through the regions of the city where an honest gentleman may easily get holes in his skin, in his purse, or in his coat.

Madame de Nevers — it must be confessed to the shame of humanity — endured impatiently this rivalry of La Mole. It was not that she disliked the Provençal. Quite the contrary. Led by that irresistible instinct which urges every woman to play the coquette with another woman's lover, especially when that woman is her friend, she had not spared La Mole the flashes of her emerald eyes, and Coconnas had sometimes envied the free hand-shakings and tokens of tenderness bestowed on his friend in those periods of caprice when the star of the Piedmontese seemed to pale in the sky of his beautiful mistress. But Coconnas, who would have cut the throats of fifteen persons for a single wink of the eye at his lady, was so little jealous of La Mole that often after these inconsistencies of the duchess he had whispered to him certain offers which had made the Provençal blush.

It resulted from this state of things that Henriette — whom the absence of La Mole deprived of all the advantages the society of Coconnas afforded her; that is to say, his inexhaustible gayety and his endless entertaining

caprices — came one day to beg of Marguerite to restore to her that necessary third party, in whose absence the mind and heart of Coconnas were gradually wasting away.

Marguerite, always compassionate, and besides urged by the prayers of La Mole and the desires of her own heart, made an appointment with Henriette for a meeting on the next day in the house with two doors, where they might thoroughly consider these matters without interruption.

Coconnas received with a very ill grace Henriette's summons to be in the Rue Tizon at half-past nine. Nevertheless, he went to the appointed place, where he found Henriette already arrived, and not a little offended at being there first.

"Fie, Monsieur!" cried she, as he entered, "what bad manners to make, I will not say a princess, but a woman wait in this way!"

"Wait?" replied Coconnas. "I like that! I'll wager you what you like that we are before our time."

"I was, yes."

"Bah! and so am I. I'll bet it is n't later than ten o'clock."

"Very well! my note said half-past nine."

"And therefore I left the Louvre at nine, — for I am in the service of the Duc d'Alençon, I would say in passing, which will oblige me to leave you in an hour."

"And that pleases you?"

"Upon my soul, no! But M. d'Alençon is a surly and whimsical master; and if there is to be a scolding I would rather it would come from pretty lips like yours than from a crooked mouth like his."

"Come, now," said the duchess, "that is a little better. You say, then, that you left the Louvre at nine o'clock?"

"Oh, certainly, yes, — intending to come straight here;

but at the corner of the Rue de Grenelle I saw a man who looked like La Mole."

"Good! still La Mole."

"Always, with or without permission."

"Rude!"

"Ah!" said Coconnas, "we are beginning our compliments again."

"No; but finish your story."

"I am not anxious to tell it; but you asked me why I was late."

"Certainly; is it for me to arrive first?"

"Eh! You have no one to search for."

"You are assuming, my dear. But continue. At the corner of the Rue de Grenelle you saw a man who resembled La Mole. But what is that on your doublet, — blood?"

"Good! that was a man who splashed me as he fell."

"You have been fighting?"

"I should say so."

"For your La Mole?"

"For whom would you have me fight, — for a woman?"

"Thank you."

"I followed, then, that man who had the impudence to borrow the manner of my friend; I overtook him in the Rue Coquilière. I went in front of him and examined him closely by the light from a shop-window. It was not he."

"Good! that was well done."

"Yes, but it was unlucky for him. 'Monsieur,' I said to him, 'you are a fool to allow yourself to bear a distant resemblance to my friend La Mole, who is an accomplished cavalier, while it is easy to see, on a near view, that you are only a vagabond.' Upon that he drew his sword, and I drew mine. At the third pass, — see his bad manners! — he splashed me as he fell."

"And did you not afford him any help?"

"I was about to do so when a man passed on horseback. Ah, then, Duchess, I was sure it was La Mole. Unfortunately, the horse was going at a gallop. I ran after the horse; and the crowd which had gathered to see me fight ran after me. Now, as I might have been taken for a thief, followed as I was by that mob howling at my heels, I was obliged to turn and put them to flight; and so I lost a little time. Meanwhile the horseman had disappeared. I resumed the pursuit. I inquired, I demanded, giving the color of the horse; but *baste!* useless, — no one had noticed him. And so, tired out, I came here."

"Tired out!" said the duchess; "that was very kind in you."

"Listen, dear friend," said Coconnas, turning carelessly in his armchair; "you are still about to persecute me with reference to La Mole. Well, you are wrong; for in short, friendship, you see (I wish I had his wit or his learning, that poor friend's; I should find some comparison which would make you feel my thought) — friendship, you see, is a star; while love — love — well, I have found the comparison — love is only a candle. You will tell me that there are many kinds —"

"Of loves?"

"No, of candles; and that among those different kinds some are preferable to others, — the rose candle, for example. Agreed as to the rose, — it is the best; but rose though it be, the candle is consumed, while the star shines forever. To that you will reply that when the candle is consumed one can light another."

"M. de Coconnas, you are a fool."

"La!"

"M. de Coconnas, you are impertinent."

"La! la!"

"M. de Coconnas, you are a knave."

"Madame, I warn you that you will make me regret La Mole three times as much."

"You no longer love me."

"On the contrary, Duchess, I idolize you; but you do not understand the thing. I can love you, cherish you, idolize you, and yet employ my spare time in eulogizing my friend!"

"You call the moments passed with me spare time!"

"I can't help it; that poor La Mole is forever in my thoughts!"

"And you prefer him to me! it is insulting. Come, Annibal, I detest you. Deal candidly with me; tell me that you prefer him to me. Annibal, I warn you that if you dare to prefer anything in the world to me —"

"Henriette, most lovely duchess! let me advise you, for the sake of your own tranquillity, not to ask unwise questions. I love you more than all other women, but I love La Mole more than all other men."

"Well answered!" said a strange voice, suddenly; and a large damask curtain being raised discovered a panel which, sliding back into the wall, and forming a mode of communication between the two apartments, revealed La Mole framed in that opening, like one of Titian's splendid paintings set in a gilded frame.

"La Mole!" exclaimed Coconnas, without noticing Marguerite, or taking time to thank her for the surprise she had arranged for him, — "La Mole! my friend! my dear, dear friend!"

So saying, he threw himself into his friend's arms, knocking over the table that stood in his way, as well as the armchair he had occupied.

La Mole returned his greetings with effusion; but in the midst of it all he turned to the Duchesse de Nevers and said, "You must pardon me, Madame, if the mention

of my name has been allowed to disturb your happiness; certainly," continued he, regarding Marguerite with ineffable tenderness, "it has not been my fault that I have not sooner returned."

"You see, Henriette," said Marguerite, taking up the conversation, "I have kept my word; here he is!"

"Is it then only to the prayers of Madame the Duchess that I owe this happiness?" asked La Mole.

"To her prayers alone," replied Marguerite; then facing him, she added, "La Mole, I give you leave not to believe a word I say."

Meanwhile, Coconnas, after having embraced his friend and walked round and round him a dozen times, after even holding a light to his face, the better to gaze on his beloved features, suddenly turned towards Henriette, and kneeling down, kissed the hem of her robe.

"Well, well!" said the Duchesse de Nevers, "I like that! you find me endurable at last?"

"*Mordi!*" replied Coconnas, "you are, as you always are to me, adorable. Only, I can now tell you so with a lighter heart; and I wish I had here a score of Poles, Sarmatians, and other barbarous hyperboreans, to make them confess that you are queen of the beautiful."

"Gently, gently, Coconnas," interposed La Mole; "and Madame Marguerite, then?"

"Oh! I take nothing back," answered Coconnas, with that half-comic air peculiarly his own; "Madame Henriette is queen of the beautiful, and Madame Marguerite is the beautiful among queens."

"Come, then, my beautiful queen!" said Madame de Nevers, perceiving that Coconnas had neither eyes nor ears for any one but La Mole, "let us leave these tender friends to have an hour's chat together. M. de Coconnas will perhaps be a little more rational after that."

Marguerite whispered a few words to La Mole, who, whatever might have been his desire to see his friend once more, would have been quite content had the tenderness of Coconnas been less exacting. Coconnas meantime was trying, by force of protestations, to elicit a pleasant smile and a friendly word from the lips of Henriette, — an effort easily successful.

Then the two women went into the adjoining chamber, where supper was awaiting them, and the two young men were left alone.

The first questions asked by Coconnas related to that fatal evening in which La Mole had been so near to losing his life. As La Mole proceeded in his narration, the Piedmontese shook with emotion. "And why," he asked, "instead of running away as you did, and causing me so much anxiety, did you not seek refuge with our master the duke, who would have received and protected you?"

"Our master!" said La Mole, in a low voice, "the Duc d'Alençon?"

"Yes, according to what he has told me, it is to him that you owe your life."

"I owe my life to the King of Navarre," replied La Mole.

"Oh, oh!" said Coconnas; "are you sure of it?"

"It is beyond a doubt."

"Oh, the good, the excellent king! but what part did the Duc d'Alençon play in the affair?"

"He held the cord with which I was to be strangled."

"*Mordi!*" exclaimed Coconnas, springing up with violent energy; "are you sure of that? What! a pale-faced sickly-looking prince, a currish mongrel, dare to strangle my friend! — *mordi!* by to-morrow he shall hear my opinion on the subject."

"Are you mad?"

"It is true, he might begin again — But what matter? the affair must not be passed over in this way."

"Come, come, Coconnas, calm yourself, and try not to forget that it is half-past eleven o'clock, and that you are in waiting to-night at the Louvre."

"What care I for that? Good! he may wait long ere he has my attendance. What, do you suppose I will ever again serve a man who has held a cord to murder my friend? You are jesting! No, no, the hand of Providence has reunited us, and from you I go no more. If you stay here I remain also."

"For the love of Heaven, Coconnas, mind what you are about; you are not drunk!"

"Luckily, for if I were I should set the Louvre on fire."

"Come, Annibal," replied La Mole, "be reasonable. Return yonder. The service is a sacred matter."

"Will you return with me?"

"Impossible."

"Are they still thinking of killing you?"

"I don't think so; I am of too little importance for them to have a settled plan against me. They undertook to kill me in a moment of caprice, — that is all; the princes were on a lark that night."

"What do you propose to do, then?"

"I? nothing. I will stroll about; I will take a walk."

"Well, I will take a walk, like you; I will stroll with you, — it is a charming occupation. Then, if they attack us, there will be two of us, and we will give them work to do. Ah, let him come on, your insect of a duke! I will pin him to the wall, like a butterfly!"

"But ask him for leave of absence, then."

"Yes, final."

"In that case, notify him that you leave him."

"Nothing more fitting. I consent to that. I will write to him."

"It is very improper, Coconnas, to write to him, — a prince of the blood!"

"Yes, of the blood! of the blood of my friend. Take care!" cried Coconnas, rolling his eyes tragically, — "take care that I don't make short work of matters of etiquette!"

"In fact," said La Mole to himself, "in a few days he will have no need of the prince nor of any one; for if he is willing to go with us we will take him away."

Coconnas took the pen without further opposition from his friend, and hastily composed the following bit of eloquence: —

My Lord, — There can be no doubt but that your Highness, versed in the writings of antiquity, is acquainted with the touching story of Orestes and Pylades, two heroes celebrated alike for their misfortunes and their friendship. My friend La Mole is not less unfortunate than was Orestes, and I am not less devoted than was Pylades. Affairs of the utmost importance to him demand my aid at this particular moment; it is therefore impossible for me to leave him. So that with the permission of your Highness, I will take a furlough, resolved as I am to follow the fortune of my friend whithersoever it may lead me. This will show your Highness how great is the force which tears me from your Highness's service, by reason of which I do not despair of obtaining forgiveness, and venture to continue to call myself, Monseigneur,

Your royal Highness's most humble and most obedient

Annibal, Comte de Coconnas,

Inseparable friend of M. de la Mole.

This masterpiece being finished, Coconnas read it in a loud voice to La Mole, who shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Coconnas,

who had not seen the movement, or feigned not to have seen it.

"Why, I say that M. d'Alençon will laugh at us."

"At us?"

"Conjointly."

"That is better, it seems to me, than to strangle us separately."

"Bah!" said La Mole, laughing; "perhaps the one will not prevent the other."

"Well, so much the worse! Come what will, I shall send the letter to-morrow morning. Where shall we go to find a bed on leaving here?"

"To Maître la Hurière's. You remember, — that little chamber where you tried to murder me before we were Orestes and Pylades."

"Well, I will get our host to take my letter to the Louvre."

At this moment the panel was slid back.

"Well," inquired both princesses in the same breath; "and where are Orestes and Pylades?"

"*Mordi*, Madame!" replied Coconnas, "Pylades and Orestes are dying of hunger and of love."

It was, in fact, Maître la Hurière who, at nine o'clock the following morning, carried to the Louvre the respectful missive of Comte Annibal de Coconnas.

CHAPTER XIV.

ORTHON.

Henri de Navarre, after the refusal of the Duc d'Alençon, which left everything undecided and in peril, even his very existence, had become, if possible, more intimate with the prince than he had been before; from which circumstance Catherine concluded that not only did the two princes understand each other, but also that they were engaged in some conspiracy.

She questioned Marguerite on the subject, but Marguerite was worthy of her mother; and so skilfully did the Queen of Navarre parry her mother's inquiries, that, having answered to all, she left her more uncertain than before.

The Florentine had thus no guide but the spirit of intrigue she had brought with her from Tuscany; and the first conclusion she came to was that as the hated Béarnais derived the principal part of his strength from his alliance with the Duc d'Alençon, it would be expedient to separate them as speedily as possible.

From the instant in which she formed this resolution, Catherine continued to beset her son with the patience and skill of a fisherman who, having dropped his leads at some distance from the fish, gradually draws them together until his prey is surrounded on all sides.

Duc François was conscious of the increased affection shown him by his mother, whose advances he received with every manifestation of pleasure. As for Henri, he

affected to know nothing of what was going on, but he kept a more watchful eye on his ally than he had hitherto done. Everybody seemed to await some event.

Now, while all were in that attitude of expectation, on a morning when the sun had risen with more than wonted splendor, and the rich balmy air was filled with the odor of a thousand flowers, a pale and sickly-looking man came forth from a small house situated behind the Arsenal, and feebly dragged his way, supporting himself by a staff, towards the Rue de Petit Musc.

Having reached the Porte St. Antoine, he diverged from the boulevard and entered the Archery Garden, the man who kept the gate receiving him with every demonstration of respect.

No one was in the garden, which, as its name indicates, belonged to an association of archers. But had there been spectators present, the pale stranger would have well merited their commiseration and sympathy; for his long mustache and his military step, weakened by sickness and suffering, sufficiently indicated that he was some officer recently wounded, seeking to regain his strength by gentle exercise in the sunlight. Yet, strange to say, when the cloak with which (spite of the increasing warmth) the apparently harmless visitant was clad flew open, it displayed a pair of long pistols hanging to the silver clasps of his belt, which also sustained a dagger and a sword of colossal size, the latter of which hung heavily at his side, and with its ponderous sheath clattered against his shrunken and trembling legs. Besides all this, and for further increase of precautions, the lounger, solitary as he was, at every step cast a searching glance around, questioning every path, every bush, every ditch. Thus advancing into the garden, the man selected for a resting-place a small covered arbor looking on the boulevards, from which it was

separated only by a thick hedge and a small ditch, which formed a double barrier. Extending his weary limbs on a turfy bank within reach of a table, he beckoned the porter, — who, in addition to the duties of *concierge*, exercised also the vocation of a vintner, — and saying a few words, was quickly supplied with what appeared to be a species of cordial.

The invalid had been about ten minutes in his shady retreat, slowly discussing the draught brought to him by the *concierge*, when suddenly his countenance, notwithstanding its interesting pallor, assumed a fearful expression. He had just noticed the approach of a cavalier who, turning quickly round the corner of a street, advanced, wrapped in a large cloak, and stopped just before his eyes. Scarcely had the pale stranger in the arbor (who was no other than Maurevel) a little recovered from the agitation occasioned by the unexpected presence of the cavalier, when he observed that the latter was joined by a second person, dressed in the garb of a page.

Concealed beneath his leafy bower, Maurevel could see everything and hear everything without difficulty. And when the reader learns that the cavalier was Mouy, and that the young man was Orthon, he can judge whether Maurevel found employment for his eyes and ears.

Both looked carefully around them, while Maurevel held his breath lest a sound should escape him.

"You may speak now in safety, Monsieur," said the younger and more confident of the two; "we are quite secure here; none can either see or hear us."

"'T is well!" answered Mouy. "Now attend! you are to go to Madame de Sauve's, and should she be at home give this into her own hands; but if she be not in her apartments then place the letter where the king is accustomed to deposit his, — behind the mirror. Wait at

the Louvre; and if any reply is sent bring it, you know where. Should you not be charged with an answer, then meet me to-night, with a petronel, at the spot I pointed out to you, and which I have just left."

"Enough!" said Orthon; "I understand."

"I must now leave you," continued Mouy; "I have much to do during the day. It will be useless for you to go to the Louvre till *he* is there; and I have every reason to believe *he* will be engaged all day studying hawking. Go, and fear not to show yourself at the Louvre; you can say that being now quite recovered, you come to thank Madame de Sauve for the kind care she took of you during your illness."

Maurevel, with fixed gaze, continued to listen till the perspiration gathered in large drops on his forehead. His first impulse had been to detach one of the pistols from his belt and take deadly aim at Mouy, but at that instant the sudden opening of the latter's cloak displayed a cuirass, firm and solid. Probably the ball would flatten on the cuirass, or would strike some part of the body where the wound might not be mortal. Then, he reflected, Mouy, vigorous and well armed, would have the advantage of him, wounded as he was; and with a sigh he drew back the pistol already pointed at the Huguenot. "How unfortunate," he murmured, "that I cannot stretch him dead on the spot, without any other witness than that young varlet, who would have served as a capital mark for my second pistol!"

Then, on the other hand, it occurred to him that the note sent by the page to Madame de Sauve might be better worth taking than even the life of the Huguenot chief.

"Well," said he, "be it so, then; you escape me this morning, but to-morrow I will settle all scores with you,

if I pursue you to that hell from which you have sprung to ruin me, unless I first destroy you!"

At this instant, Mouy, folding his cloak around him, and concealing his features in its large folds, departed in the direction of the Temple, while Orthon took the road that conducted to the banks of the river.

Then Maurevel, rising with more vigor and agility than he had dared to hope for, regained the Rue de la Cerisaie, caused a horse to be saddled, and, weak as he was, and at the risk of again opening his newly-closed wounds, he set off at full gallop towards the Rue St. Antoine, reached the quays, and darted into the Louvre.

Five minutes after he had passed the wicket, Catherine was in full possession of all that had occurred, and Maurevel had received the thousand golden crowns promised him for the arrest of the King of Navarre.

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Catherine, exultingly, "either I am much deceived, or Mouy will turn out the black spot discovered by René in the horoscope of this cursed Béarnais."

A quarter of an hour after Maurevel, Orthon reached the Louvre, and having fearlessly shown himself as directed by Mouy, proceeded unmolested to the apartments of Madame de Sauve. There he found only Dariole, who informed him that her lady was occupied, by the queen's orders, in transcribing letters for her Majesty, who had summoned her for that purpose within the last five minutes.

"It does not signify," replied Orthon; "I can wait." Then, profiting by the freedom he had always been permitted to enjoy, he went into the adjoining chamber, which was the sleeping-room of the baroness, and after assuring himself that he was unobserved, carefully deposited the note behind the looking-glass. Just as he

was withdrawing his hand from the mirror, Catherine entered the room. Orthon changed color, for he fancied that the quick, searching glance of the queen-mother was first directed to the glass.

"What are you doing here, my little fellow?" asked Catherine; "seeking for Madame de Sauve, I suppose?"

"Yes, indeed, your Majesty; it is a long time since I saw her, and if I delay returning her my thanks, I fear she will think me ungrateful."

"You love Madame de Sauve, then, very much, do you not?"

"Oh, that I do, with all my heart! I can never forget the kindness Madame de Sauve condescended to bestow on a humble servitor like myself."

"And upon what occasion was it that she showed you all this care and attention?" inquired Catherine, feigning to be ignorant of what had befallen the youth.

"When I was wounded, Madame."

"Ah, poor child!" said Catherine, "you have been wounded?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And when was that?"

"The night that they tried to arrest the King of Navarre. I was so terrified at the sight of the soldiers that I called out for help; one of them gave me a blow on the head, and I fell senseless to the ground."

"Poor child! and you are now quite recovered?"

"Oh, quite, Madame!"

"And that being the case," continued Catherine, "I suppose you are trying to get back into the service of the King of Navarre?"

"No, indeed, Madame; when the King of Navarre learned that I had presumed to resist your Majesty's orders, he dismissed me in heavy displeasure."

"Really!" said Catherine, with a tone expressive of the deepest interest. "Well, I will take the arrangement of that affair into my own hands; but if you are looking for Madame de Sauve, you will do so in vain. She is at this moment busily occupied in my apartments." Then, thinking that Orthon might not have had time to place his note behind the glass previous to her entrance, she returned to the adjoining chamber, in order to afford the requisite opportunity for his so doing.

But just as Orthon, uneasy at the unexpected arrival of the queen-mother, was asking himself whether the circumstance did not in some way forebode evil to his master, he heard three gentle taps against the ceiling, — the very signal he was in the habit of using to warn his master of the approach of danger during his visits to Madame de Sauve. He started at the sound; a sudden light seemed to break in upon his mind, and he appropriated the warning to himself, — danger was near, doubtless; and hastily springing towards the mirror, he withdrew the paper he had previously placed there.

Through a rent in the tapestried hangings, Catherine watched every movement of the youth; she saw him dart forward to the mirror, but whether to take away or to conceal the coveted paper, she could not detect. Returning to the apartment, with a smiling countenance she said, "What! here still, my little man? What are you waiting for, then? Did I not promise to take charge of your future prospects? Do you doubt my word?"

"God forbid, Madame!" replied Orthon; then, kneeling before the queen, he kissed the hem of her robe, and hastily quitted the room. As he went out he observed the captain of the guards waiting the orders of Catherine in the antechamber. This was far from calming his ap-

prehensions; on the contrary, it increased the vague terror under which he already labored.

As soon as the folds of the massy curtain which hung before the door had closed on the form of Orthon, Catherine darted to the mirror; but vainly did she thrust her eager hand behind it. She found no letter, and yet she was sure that she had seen the youth approach the mirror, — it was, then, to recover, and not to deposit the missive. Fatality gave an equal force to her adversaries. A child became a man the moment he contended against her. She shook the mirror, examined, sounded. Nothing there! "Oh, the poor wretch!" she cried. "I wished him no harm, but in withdrawing that note he hastens to his doom. Ho, there, M. de Nancey!"

The vibrating voice of the queen crossed the salon and penetrated even to the anteroom, where M. de Nancey awaited her orders. At the sound of his name thus pronounced, the captain of the guards lost not an instant in obeying the summons. "What is your Majesty's pleasure?" said he, on entering.

"Did you but now observe a youth — nay, a mere child — go hence?"

"I did, Madame."

"Call him back."

"By what name shall I address him?"

"By that of Orthon. Should he refuse to return, bring him back by force; but do not alarm him if he comes unresistingly. I must speak with him directly."

The captain of the guards darted out. Orthon had scarcely got halfway downstairs; for he was descending slowly in the hope of meeting on the stairs or seeing in some corridor the King of Navarre or Madame de Sauve. He heard himself called, and a cold shudder seized him, for he guessed who had sent for him. His first impulse

was to fly, but with an accuracy of judgment above his years, he quickly perceived that flight would be certain ruin. He therefore stopped and inquired, "Who calls me?"

"I do, — M. de Nancey," replied the captain of the guards, hurriedly descending the stairs.

"But I am in a very great hurry," replied Orthon.

"By order of her Majesty the Queen-mother."

The terrified boy wiped the perspiration from his brow, and turned back, the captain following. As he entered the room where the queen-mother waited he trembled, and a deathly paleness came over him. The poor boy was as yet too young to exercise a more practised control over himself. "Madame," he said, "you have done me the honor to recall me. How can I be of service to your Majesty?"

"I have recalled you, child," answered Catherine, with a bright and encouraging smile, "because your countenance pleases me; and having promised to interest myself in your welfare, I wish to do so at once. They accuse us of being forgetful. It is not our heart which is forgetful, but our mind, crowded by events. Now I have remembered that kings hold in their hands the fortune of men, and so I sent for you. Come, my child, follow me."

M. de Nancey, who took this scene seriously, regarded the tender manner of Catherine with great astonishment.

"Can you ride, little one?" asked Catherine.

"Yes, Madame."

"Then come into my cabinet, and I will give you a message to carry to St. Germain."

"I am at your Majesty's commands."

"Order a horse to be prepared, M. de Nancey."

The captain of the guards disappeared.

"Now then, boy!" said Catherine, leading the way and signing for Orthon to follow her.

The queen-mother descended a flight of stairs, then entered the corridor in which were situated the apartments of the Duc d'Alençon and the king, reached the winding staircase, again descended a flight of stairs, and opening a door leading to a circular gallery, of which none but the king and herself possessed the key, made Orthon pass through before her, then, entering after him, closed the door. This gallery formed a sort of rampart round a portion of the apartments occupied by the king and queen-mother, and resembled the corridor of the Castle of St. Angelo at Rome, or that of the Pitti Palace at Florence, designed to serve as a place of refuge in case of danger.

The door secured, Catherine and her companion found themselves enclosed in a dark corridor. They advanced a few steps, the queen leading the way and the page following, when suddenly Catherine turned round; and Orthon perceived on her countenance the same gloomy expression it had worn ten minutes previously. Her eyes, round, like those of the cat or panther, seemed to dart forth sparks of fire.

"Stop!" cried she.

Orthon felt a cold shiver pervade his frame; the damp, chill air of that unfrequented spot seemed to cling around him like an icy mantle; the floor seemed like the cover of a tomb; Catherine's look was pointed, so to speak, and penetrated the young man's breast. He recoiled and leaned all trembling against the wall.

"Where is the letter you were desired to give to the King of Navarre?"

"The letter?" stammered Orthon.

"Ay, the letter, which, in the event of not finding the king, you were instructed to place behind the mirror."

"Indeed, Madame," said Orthon, "I know not to what your Majesty alludes."

"The letter given you by M. de Mouy, about an hour since, behind the Archery Garden."

"Your Majesty is wholly mistaken or misinformed," answered Orthon; "I have no letter."

"You lie!" said Catherine. "Give me that letter, and I will fulfil the promise I have made you."

"What letter, Madame?"

"I will make you rich."

"I have no letter, Madame."

Catherine began to lose all patience. She ground her teeth with rage; then, suddenly checking herself, and assuming a bland smile, she said, "Give it to me, and you shall have a thousand crowns of gold."

"I have no letter, Madame."

"Two thousand crowns."

"Impossible. Since I have no letter, I cannot give you one."

"Ten thousand crowns, Orthon!"

Orthon, who perceived the rising anger of the queen, decided that the only chance remaining of preserving his master's secret was to swallow the disputed billet. With this design, he attempted to take it from his pocket; Catherine divined his intention and stopped him.

"There, there, my child!" said she, laughing, "that will do. Your fidelity, it seems, is above all temptation. Well, when royalty would secure to itself a faithful follower, it is necessary to try the devotedness of the heart it would attach. I now know what opinion to form of your zeal and faithfulness. Take this purse, in earnest of my future bounty, and carry the note to your master, with an intimation that after to-day I take you into my service. You may now depart; you can let yourself

out by the door by which we entered; it opens from within."

So saying, Catherine placed a heavily filled purse in the hands of the astonished youth, walked on a few steps, and placed her hand against the wall.

But the young man stood hesitating. He could not believe that the danger which he had felt so near was withdrawn from him.

"Come, don't tremble so," said Catherine. "Have n't I said that you are free to go, and that if you are willing to return, your fortune is made?"

"Thanks, gracious madame!" murmured Orthon. "Then you pardon me?"

"I do more; I reward you as a faithful bearer of billets-doux, — a pleasing messenger of love! Only you forget that your master is waiting for you."

"True!" said the youth, springing towards the door.

But scarcely had he advanced three steps when the floor gave way beneath his feet. He stumbled, extended his hands with a fearful cry, and disappeared in one of those horrible *oubliettes* of the Louvre of which Catherine had just touched the spring.

"Now, then," said Catherine, "thanks to this fool's obstinacy, I shall have nearly two hundred stairs to descend!"

The Florentine then returned to her apartments, whence she took a dark lantern, then returning to the gallery, closed the spring and opened the door of a spiral staircase, which seemed as though contrived to penetrate into the very bowels of the earth. Proceeding along the windings of this descent, she reached a second door, which, revolving on its hinges, admitted to the depths of the *oubliette*, where — crushed, bleeding, and mutilated by a fall of more than one hundred feet — lay the still palpitating

form of poor Orthon; while, on the other side of the wall forming the barrier of this dreadful spot, the waters of the Seine were heard to ripple by, brought by a subterranean excavation to the foot of the staircase.

Having reached the damp and unwholesome abyss, which during her reign had witnessed numerous scenes like this, Catherine proceeded to search the corpse, eagerly seized the letter, ascertained by the lantern that it was the one she sought, then pushing the mangled body from her with her foot, she pressed a spring, the bottom of the *oubliette* sank down, and the corpse, sliding down by its own weight, disappeared towards the river.

Closing the door after her, she reascended, and returning to her cabinet, read the paper poor Orthon had so valiantly defended. It was conceived in these words:

This evening at ten o'clock, Rue de l'Arbre Sec, Hôtel de la Belle Étoile. Should you come, no reply is needed; if otherwise, say "No" to the bearer.

MOUY DE SAINT-PHALE.

As Catherine read these words, a smile of triumph curled her lip. She thought only of the victory she had gained, completely forgetting at what cost it had been won. And after all, what was Orthon? A faithful, devoted follower; a young, a handsome, and noble-minded youth, — nothing more; of no weight in the balance in which the destinies of empires are suspended.

Having read the note, Catherine immediately returned to the apartments of Madame de Sauve, and placed it behind the mirror. As she returned, she found the captain of the guards in the corridor.

"Madame," said M. de Nancey, "according to your Majesty's orders, the horse is ready."

"My dear baron," said Catherine, "the horse is use-

less; I have talked with the boy and find that he is not sufficiently intelligent to be intrusted with the message I designed to send by him. I have therefore made him a little present, and dismissed him by the small side-wicket."

"But," persisted M. de Nancey, "that commission?"

"That commission?" Catherine repeated.

"Yes, the errand to St. Germain. Does your Majesty wish that I go myself, or shall I send one of my men?"

"No," said Catherine; "both you and your men, M. de Nancey, will have other work this evening." And Catherine returned to her apartments well assured that in the course of that evening she would hold in her hands the fate of that accursed King of Navarre.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOSTELRY OF THE BELLE ÉTOILE.

Two hours after the event we have described, Madame de Sauve, having completed her attendance on the queen, entered her apartments. Henri followed her; and Dariole having informed him that Orthon had been there, he went to the glass and took the letter. It was, as we have seen, couched in these terms:

This evening at ten o'clock, Rue de l'Arbre Sec, Hôtel de la Belle Étoile. Should you come, no reply is needed; if otherwise, say "No" to the bearer.

MOUY DE SAINT-PHALE.

There was no address upon the letter.

"Henri is certain to go," Catherine had reflected; "for even did he not wish it, he cannot find the bearer to tell him so."

Catherine was right; Henri inquired after Orthon. Dariole told him that he had gone out with the queen-mother; but Henri felt no uneasiness, as he knew Orthon was incapable of betraying him. He dined as usual at the king's table, who rallied him upon the mistakes he had made that morning in hawking. Henri excused himself, alleging that he dwelt on the mountains, and not in the plains; but he promised Charles to study the noble art. Catherine was in an excellent humor; and when she rose from table, requested Marguerite to pass the evening with her.

At eight o'clock Henri took two of his gentlemen, went out by the Porte St. Honoré, entered again by the Tour de Bois, crossed the Seine at the ferry of the Nesle, went up the Rue St. Jacques, and there dismissed his companions, as if he were going to an amorous rendezvous. At the corner of the Rue des Mathurins he found a man on horseback, wrapped in a large cloak; he approached him.

"Mantes!" said the man.

"Pau!" replied the king.

The horseman instantly dismounted. Henri wrapped himself in the man's splashed mantle, sprang on his horse, rode down the Rue de la Harpe, crossed the Pont St. Michel, passed the Rue Barthélemy, crossed the river again on the Pont aux Meuniers, descended the quays, reached the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, and knocked at Maître la Hurière's.

La Mole was in a little chamber, writing a long love-letter, — to whom may be easily imagined. Coconnas was in the kitchen, watching half a dozen partridges roasting, and disputing with La Hurière as to whether they were done or not. At this moment Henri knocked. Grégoire went to take his horse, and the traveller entered, stamping on the floor as if to warm his feet.

"Eh!" said La Mole, continuing to write; "La Hurière, here is a gentleman who wants you."

La Hurière advanced, looked at Henri from head to foot; and as his large cloak did not inspire him with very great veneration, "Who are you?" he asked.

"Eh, *sang Dieu!*" returned Henri, pointing to La Mole. "I am, as the gentleman told you, a Gascon gentleman come to Paris to appear at court."

"What do you want?"

"A room and supper."

"Hum!" said La Hurière, "have you a lackey?"

It was, as we know, his usual question.

"No," Henri replied, "but I count on having one when I have made my fortune."

"I do not let a room to any one unless he has a lackey."

"Even if I offer you a rose noble for the supper, and your own price for the room?"

"Oh, oh! you are very generous, my gentleman," said La Hurière, looking at Henri with suspicion.

"No; but expecting to sup here, I invited a friend of mine to meet me. Have you any good wine of Artois?"

"Henri de Navarre drinks no better."

"Ah, good! Here is my friend."

As he spoke, the door opened, and a gentleman somewhat older than the first, and having a long rapier at his side, entered.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "you are exact, my young friend. It is something for a man who has travelled two hundred leagues to be so punctual."

"Is this your friend?" asked La Hurière.

"Yes," replied the first, shaking hands with the young man with the rapier.

"Maître," said La Mole to La Hurière, "free us from these Huguenot fellows; Coconnas and I cannot converse together while they are there."

"Carry the supper into No. 2, on the third floor," said La Hurière. "Upstairs, gentlemen."

The two travellers followed Grégoire, who lighted them.

La Mole followed them with his eyes until they had disappeared; then turning, he saw Coconnas at the kitchen door. Two wide-open, staring eyes and a gaping mouth gave to his face a remarkable expression of astonishment. La Mole approached him.

"*Mordi!*" said Coconnas, "did you see?"

"What?"

"Those two gentlemen."

"Well?"

"I would swear that they are Henri de Navarre and the man in the red mantle."

"Swear if you wish, but not so loud."

"You also recognized them?"

"Certainly."

"What are they doing here?"

"Some love-affair."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"I'll bet they are engaged in some conspiracy."

"Ah! you are foolish."

"But I tell you —"

"And I tell you that if they conspire, it is their own affair."

"Ah! that is true. At any rate," said Coconnas, "I am no longer in the service of M. d'Alençon; let them do as they please."

Meantime Henri and Mouy were installed in their chamber.

"Well, Sire," said Mouy, "have you seen Orthon?"

"No; but I found the note which he placed behind the mirror. I suppose he was frightened; the queen came in while he was there, and he went away without waiting for me. I had some fear about him, for Dariole told me the queen had a long conversation with him."

"Oh, there is no danger; he is very quick-witted. I will venture to say the queen did not learn much from him."

"Have you seen him yourself?"

"No, but he will come at midnight to attend me, armed with a good petronel; and he can tell us what took place as we walk along."

"And the man who was at the corner of the Rue Mathurins?"

"What man?"

"The man whose horse and cloak I have; are you sure of him?"

"He is one of our most devoted associates; besides, he does n't know that the affair is with your Majesty."

"We can discuss our business, then, in all security?"

"Without any doubt. Besides, La Mole is on guard."

"Good!"

"Well, Sire, what says M. d'Alençon?"

"He will not go; he says so distinctly. The departure of D'Anjou and the king's illness have changed all his plans."

"So it is he who made our plan miscarry?"

"Yes."

"He betrays us, then?"

"Not yet; but he is ready to do so on the first opportunity."

"Coward! traitor! Why did he not answer my letters?"

"In order to have proofs against you, and that you should have none against him. Meantime all is lost, is it not, Mouy?"

"On the contrary, all is won. You know all the party, except Condé's fraction, were for you, and only used D'Alençon as a safeguard. Well, since the day of the ceremony I have arranged everything. I shall have fifteen hundred horse ready in a week; they will be posted on the road to Pau; they will surely suffice?"

Henri smiled and laid his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Mouy," said he, "you, and you alone, know that the King of Navarre is not such a coward as men think."

"I know it, Sire; and I trust ere long all France will know it too. When do you hunt again?"

"In a week or ten days."

"Well, everything seems quiet now. The Duc d'Anjou has gone, — we have no more occasion to think of him. The king gets better every day; the persecution against us has almost ceased. Play the amiable with the queen-mother and M. d'Alençon; tell the duke you cannot go without him, and try to make him believe you, which will be more difficult."

"Oh, he shall believe me!"

"Has he such confidence in you?"

"Not in me, but in the queen."

"And is the queen true to us?"

"I have ample proofs of it; besides, she is ambitious."

"Well, three days before you hunt, tell me where it will be, — at Bondy, at St. Germain, or at Rambouillet. Add that you are ready, and when you see La Mole, spur on, follow him; once out of the forest, they must have fleet steeds to overtake us."

"Agreed."

"Have you money, Sire?"

Henri made the grimace he made all his life at that question. "Not much," said he; "but I believe Margot has."

"Well, whether it be yours or hers, bring all you can with you."

"And you, — what do you propose to do meanwhile?"

"Since I have been pretty busy with the affairs of your Majesty, as you see, will your Majesty permit me to engage a little in my own affairs?"

"Certainly, Mouy; but what are your affairs?"

"Listen, Sire; Orthon tells me that yesterday he met near the Arsenal that brigand of a Maurevel, who, thanks

to René's care, has recovered, and who warms himself in the sun, like the serpent that he is."

"Ah, I understand."

"You will be king some day, and will avenge yourself as a king; I am a soldier, and avenge myself as one. When all our little affairs are arranged, which will be in five or six days, I will walk round the Arsenal myself, and after giving him two or three rapier-thrusts, I shall leave Paris with a lighter heart."

"Do as you will. By the way, you are pleased with La Mole, are you not?"

"Ah! a charming fellow, who is devoted to you, body and soul, Sire, and on whom you can rely, as upon myself, — brave — "

"And especially discreet. He must go with us to Navarre, Mouy, and once there we will see what we can do for him."

As Henri pronounced these words, the door flew open, and La Mole rushed in, pale and agitated.

"Quick! quick!" cried he, "the house is surrounded."

"Surrounded!" said Henri, rising, "by whom?"

"By the king's guards."

"Oh," said Mouy, drawing two pistols from his belt, "battle, then!"

"Pistols! and battle! — what can you do against fifty men?" said La Mole.

"He is right," said the king, "and if there were any means of retreat — "

"I know one," said La Mole, "if your Majesty will follow me."

"And Mouy — "

"Can follow us; but you must be quick."

Steps were heard on the stairs.

"It is too late," said Henri.

"If any one could occupy them five minutes," said La Mole, "I could save the king."

"I will occupy them," said Mouy. "Go, Sire, go."

"But what will you do?"

"Oh, do not fear for me, Sire; only go!"

And Mouy rapidly concealed the king's plate, goblet, and napkin, so that it might seem he had supped alone.

"Come, Sire; come!" cried La Mole.

"Mouy! my brave Mouy," said Henri, offering his hand to the young man.

Mouy seized his hand, kissed it, pushed the door to, the instant they were outside, and bolted it.

"Yes, yes, I understand," said Henri; "he will allow himself to be taken while we escape. But who the devil can have betrayed us?"

"Quick! quick, Sire!" said La Mole, "they are on the stairs!"

At this moment the torches were visible on the stairs, and the rattling of arms was heard. La Mole guided the king in the darkness, and conducting him two stories higher, opened a door, which he shut and bolted, and opening the window, "Does your Majesty fear an excursion on the roofs?" said he.

"I, a chamois-hunter!"

"Well, then, follow me, and I will guide you."

And getting out of the window, La Mole clambered along the ridge, then passed along a gully formed by two roofs, at the end of which was the open window of a garret.

"Here we are, in port," said La Mole.

"So much the better," returned Henri, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"Now, then," continued La Mole, "this garret communicates with a staircase, and the staircase with the

street. I travelled the road on a more terrible night than this."

"Go on; go on!"

La Mole sprang into the open window, opened the door, found himself at the head of a winding staircase, and placing the cord that served as a baluster in Henri's hand, "Come, Sire," said he.

Henri had stopped before a window opposite the Belle Étoile; the stairs were crowded with soldiers, some with swords in their hands, others with torches. Suddenly the king saw a group descend the stairs, with Mouy in the midst; he had surrendered his sword, and descended quietly.

"Brave Mouy!" said the king.

"Faith, Sire, he seems very composed, and see, he even laughs! He must be meditating some good turn, for you know he laughs rarely."

"And the young man who was with you?"

"M. de Coconnas?" asked La Mole.

"Yes, M. de Coconnas. What has become of him?"

"Oh, Sire, have no uneasiness about him. On seeing the soldiers, he said to me, 'Do we risk anything?' 'Our heads,' I answered. 'And you will escape?' 'I hope so!' 'Well, then, so will I,' he answered; and I can assure you, Sire, that he will escape. When any one takes Coconnas it will be because it is convenient to him to be taken."

"All is well, then," replied Henri. "Let us try to regain the Louvre."

"Nothing easier; wrap yourself in your mantle, for the street is full of people, and we shall pass for spectators."

They gained the Rue d'Averon, but in passing by the Rue des Pouliés, they saw Mouy and his escort cross the Place St. Germain l'Auxerrois.

"Ah!" said Henri, "they are taking him to the Louvre. The devil! the wicket will be closed; they will take the name of every one who enters, and I shall be suspected of having been with him."

"Well, Sire," replied La Mole, "enter the Louvre in some other way."

"How the devil would you have me enter?"

"Has n't your Majesty the Queen of Navarre's window?"

"*Ventre-saint-gris!* M. de la Mole, you are right, and I did n't think of it! But how shall I attract her attention?"

"Oh," said La Mole, bowing with an air of respectful gratitude, "your Majesty throws stones so well!"

CHAPTER XVI.

M. DE MOUY DE SAINT-PHALE.

This time Catherine had taken her precautions so well that she believed herself sure of her object.

Consequently about ten o'clock she had sent away Marguerite, quite convinced that the Queen of Navarre was ignorant of the plot against her husband, and went to the king and begged him to delay his retirement for the night. Puzzled by the air of triumph which in spite of her habitual dissimulation appeared on his mother's countenance, Charles questioned Catherine, who only said, —

"I can make but one reply to your Majesty, and that is, you will this evening be delivered from two of your bitterest enemies."

Charles lowered his eyebrows, like a man who says to himself, "This is well; we shall see;" and whistling to his tall greyhound, who came to him, dragging his belly along the ground like a serpent, and placed his fine and intelligent head on his master's knee, he waited. After a few minutes, which Catherine passed with her eyes fixed and ears attentive, there was suddenly heard the noise of a pistol-shot in the courtyard of the Louvre.

"What noise is that?" inquired Charles, with a frown, while the hound rose up and pricked his ears.

"Nothing," Catherine replied, "it was only a signal."

"And what is the meaning of that signal?"

"It means that from this moment, Sire, your only, your real enemy is unable any longer to injure you."

"Have they been killing a man?" inquired Charles, looking at his mother with that eye of command which signified that assassination and mercy are two prerogatives pertaining to royal power.

"No, Sire, they have only arrested two."

"Oh," murmured Charles, "always hidden plots and plans in which the king has no part! *Mort diable!* Mother, I am an oldish boy, big enough to take care of myself, and want neither leading-strings nor swaddling-clothes. Go into Poland with your son Henri if you desire to reign; but here you are wrong, I tell you, to play the game you do."

"My son," replied Catherine, "this is the last time I meddle with your affairs; but this is an enterprise begun long ago, in which you have always said I was wrong, while I have labored to prove that I was right."

At this moment M. de Nancey begged an audience of the king, and there was a noise of footsteps in the vestibule, and the butts of muskets clattered on the floor.

"Let M. de Nancey enter," said the king, hastily.

M. de Nancey entered, saluted the king, and then, turning to the queen-mother, said, "Madame, your orders are executed; he is taken."

"What do you mean by *he?*" cried Catherine, much troubled; "have you only arrested one?"

"He was alone, Madame."

"Did he defend himself?"

"No, he was supping quietly in a room, and gave up his sword the moment it was demanded."

"Who is he?" asked the king.

"You will see," said Catherine. "Bring in the prisoner, M. de Nancey."

Mouy was introduced.

"Mouy!" exclaimed the king; "what is the matter now?"

"If, Sire," said Mouy, with perfect composure, "your Majesty would allow me that liberty, I would ask the same question."

"Instead of asking this question of the king," said Catherine, "have the kindness, M. de Mouy, to tell my son who was the man who was in the chamber of the King of Navarre on a certain night, and who on that night resisted the king's orders, like a rebel as he is, killed two of the guards, and wounded M. Maurevel."

"Yes," said Charles, frowning; "do you know the name of that man, M. de Mouy?"

"I do, Sire; does your Majesty desire to know it?"

"Yes, it would give me pleasure, I confess."

"Well, Sire, he is called Mouy de Saint-Phale."

"It was you, then?"

"It was, Sire."

Catherine, astonished at this audacity, recoiled before the young man.

"What!" inquired Charles IX., "dared you resist the orders of the king?"

"In the first place, Sire, I was ignorant that there was an order of your Majesty; then I saw only one thing, or rather but one man, M. Maurevel, — the assassin of my father, the assailant of the admiral. I remembered that it was a year and a half since, in the very chamber in which we now are, on the evening of the 24th of August, your Majesty had promised me to do us justice on this murderer; and as since that time very grave events had occurred, I thought that perchance the king had been, in spite of himself, turned away from his desires. Seeing Maurevel within my reach, I believed Heaven had sent

him there. Your Majesty knows the rest; I struck him down as a murderer, and fired at his men as robbers."

Charles made no reply; his friendship for Henri had for some time led him to look at things otherwise than he had been accustomed to, and sometimes even with terror. The queen-mother, in reference to the Saint Bartholomew, had set down in her memory observations which had fallen from her son, very much resembling remorse.

"But," observed the queen-mother, "what were you doing at that hour in the King of Navarre's apartments?"

"Oh," said Mouy, "it is a long story to tell, but if his Majesty has the patience to listen —"

"Yes," replied Charles, "I should wish to hear it."

"I will obey, Sire," said Mouy, bowing.

Catherine sat down, fixing an uneasy look on the young chief.

"We will listen," said Charles. "Here, Actæon!"

The dog resumed the place he had occupied before the prisoner had come in.

"Sire," said Mouy, "I came to his Majesty the King of Navarre as the deputy of our brethren, your faithful subjects of the Reformed religion —"

Catherine made a sign to Charles IX.

"Be quiet, Madame," he said; "I do not lose a word. Go on, M. de Mouy; go on."

"To inform the King of Navarre," continued Mouy, "that his abjuration had lost for him the confidence of the Huguenot party; but that nevertheless in remembrance of his father, Antoine de Bourbon, and especially out of regard for the memory of his mother, the courageous Jeanne d'Albret, whose name is dear among us, the chiefs of the Reformed religion thought it a mark of deference due to him to beg him to relinquish his claims to the crown of Navarre."

"What said he?" asked Catherine, unable, in spite of her self-control, to receive this unexpected blow without wincing a little.

"Ah, ah!" said Charles, "but this crown of Navarre, which without my permission is made thus to jump from head to head, seems to belong a little to me."

"The Huguenots, Sire, recognize better than any one the principle of suzerainty which your Majesty has just stated, and therefore hope to induce your Majesty to place the crown on some head which is dear to you."

"I!" said Charles; "on a head which is dear to me? *Mort diable!* of what head, then, do you speak, Monsieur? I do not understand you."

"Of the head of the Duc d'Alençon."

Catherine became as pale as death, and her eyes glared fiercely on Mouy.

"And did my brother d'Alençon know this?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And accepted the crown?"

"Subject to your Majesty's consent, to which he referred us."

"Ah, ah!" said Charles, "it is, indeed, a crown which would suit our brother D'Alencon wonderfully well! And that I should never have thought of it! Thanks, Mouy; thanks! when you have such ideas you will always be welcome at the palace."

"Sire, you would long since have been informed of all this, but for the unfortunate affair of the Louvre, which made me fear that I had fallen into disgrace with your Majesty."

"Yes; but," asked Catherine, "what said the King of Navarre to this proposal?"

"The king, Madame, yielded to the desire of his brethren, and his renunciation was ready."

"In this case," cried Catherine, "you must have that renunciation."

"I have, Madame," said Mouy; "and by chance I have it about me, signed by him, and dated."

"Of a date anterior to the affair in the Louvre?" inquired Catherine.

"Yes, of the previous evening, I think."

And Mouy drew from his pocket a renunciation in favor of the Duc d'Alençon, written and signed in Henri's hand, and bearing the date assigned to it.

"Faith! yes," said Charles, "and all is in due form."

"And what did Henri demand in return for this renunciation?"

"Nothing, Madame; the friendship of the King Charles, he said to us, would amply repay him for the loss of a crown."

Catherine bit her lips in anger and wrung her beautiful hands.

"This is all as complete as possible, Mouy," added the king.

"Then," asked the queen-mother, "if all was settled between you and the King of Navarre, for what purpose did you seek an interview with him this evening?"

"I, Madame! with the King of Navarre?" said Mouy. "He who arrested me will bear testimony that I was alone. Will your Majesty call him?"

"M. de Nancey," said the king; and the captain of the guards entered.

"M. de Nancey," said Catherine, quickly, "was M. de Mouy quite alone at the hostelry of the Belle Étoile?"

"In the chamber, yes, Madame; in the hostelry, no."

"Ah!" said Catherine, "who was his companion?"

"I know not if he were the companion of M. de Mouy,

Madame; but I know he escaped by a back door after having prostrated two of my guards."

"And you recognized this gentleman, no doubt."

"I did not, but the guards did."

"And who was he?" inquired Charles IX.

"M. le Comte Annibal de Coconnas."

"Annibal de Coconnas!" repeated the king, gloomy and reflective. "He who made so terrible a slaughter of the Huguenots during the Saint Bartholomew?"

"M. de Coconnas, gentleman of the Duc d'Alencon," replied Nancey.

"Good! good!" said Charles. "You may withdraw, M. de Nancey; and another time, remember one thing."

"What is that, Sire?"

"That you are in my service, and will take your orders from no one but myself."

M. de Nancey retired backwards, bowing respectfully. Mouy smiled ironically at Catherine. There was a brief silence. The queen pulled the tassels of her *cordelière;* Charles caressed his dog.

"But what was your intention, Monsieur?" continued Charles. "Were you acting violently?"

"Against whom, Sire?"

"Why, against Henri or François or myself."

"Sire, we had the renunciation of your brother-in-law, the consent of your brother, and, as I had the honor to tell you, we were on the point of soliciting your Majesty's authority, when there happened this unfortunate affair of M. Maurevel's."

"Well, Mother, I see nothing wrong in all this. You were perfectly right, M. de Mouy, in asking for a king. Yes, Navarre may be, and ought to be, a separate kingdom. Moreover, this kingdom seems made expressly to endow my brother D'Alençon, who has always had so great a

desire for a crown that when we wear our own he cannot withdraw his gaze from it. The only thing which opposed this coronation was Henriot's rights; but since Henriot voluntarily abdicates —"

"Voluntarily, Sire."

"It appears to be the will of God! M. de Mouy, you are free to return to your brethren, whom I have chastised, — somewhat rudely, perchance, but that is between God and myself; and tell them that since they desire to have my brother, the Duc d'Alençon, for King of Navarre, the King of France accedes to their desires. From this moment Navarre is a kingdom, and its sovereign's name is François. I ask but a week for my brother to be ready to leave Paris with the *éclat* and pomp which appertain to a king. Go, M. de Mouy; go. M. de Nancey, allow M. de Mouy to retire. He is free."

"Sire," said Mouy, advancing a step, "will your Majesty allow me —"

"Yes," replied Charles. And he extended his hand to the young Huguenot. Mouy went on one knee, and kissed the king's hand.

"By the way," said Charles, as Mouy was about to rise, "have you not demanded from me justice on that ruffian Maurevel?"

"I have, Sire."

"I know not where he is, that I might render it to you, for he is in hiding; but if you meet him, take justice into your own hands. I authorize you to do so, and with all my heart."

"Oh, Sire!" exclaimed Mouy, "this is all I could desire. I know not where he is; but your Majesty may rest assured that I shall find him."

Mouy respectfully saluted the king and Catherine, and then retired uninterrupted. He made all haste to the

hostelry of the Belle Étoile, where he found his horse; and three hours after he left Paris, the young man breathed in safety behind the walls of Mantes.

Catherine, bursting with rage, regained her apartments, whence she passed into those of Marguerite. There she found Henri in his dressing-gown, as if just going to bed.

"Satan!" she muttered, "aid a poor queen, for whom God will do nothing more!"

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO HEADS FOR ONE CROWN.

"REQUEST M. d'Alençon to come to me," said Charles, as his mother left him.

M. de Nancey hastened to M. d'Alençon's apartments, and delivered the king's message. The duke started when he heard it. He always trembled in Charles's presence, and the more so when he had reason to be afraid. Still, he went to his brother with all speed.

Charles was standing up, and whistling a hunting air. On entering, the Duc d'Alençon caught from the glassy eye of Charles one of those looks full of hatred which he so well understood.

"Your Majesty has asked for me," he said. "I am here, Sire. What is your Majesty's desire?"

"I desire to tell you, Brother, that in order to recompense you for the great friendship you bear me, I have resolved to do for you to-day the thing you most desire in all the world."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you. Ask yourself what that thing is of which you most frequently dream, without daring to ask for, and that thing I will give you."

"Sire," said François, "I swear to you that there is nothing I more desire than the continuance of the king's good health."

"Then you will be deeply gratified to know, D'Alençon, that the indisposition I experienced at the time when the

Poles arrived has quite passed by. I have escaped, thanks to Henriot, a furious wild boar, who would have ripped me up, and I am so well as not to envy the healthiest man in my dominions; so that without being an unkind brother, you may wish for something else besides the continuation of my health, which is excellent."

"I desire nothing else, Sire."

"Yes, yes, François," continued Charles, impatiently; "you desire the crown of Navarre, and have had an understanding to that effect with Henriot and Mouy, — with the first, that he would abdicate, and with the second, that he would secure it for you. Well, Henriot has renounced, Mouy has mentioned your wishes to me, and the crown to which you aspire —"

"Well?" said D'Alençon, in a trembling voice.

"Well, *mort diable!* it is yours."

D'Alençon turned ghastly pale, and then his face was suffused. The favor which the king granted him threw him at this moment into utter despair.

"But, Sire," he replied, palpitating with emotion, and in vain trying to recover his self-possession, "I have never desired, and certainly never sought for such a thing."

"That is possible," said the king, "for you are very discreet, Brother; but it has been desired and sought for you."

"Sire, I swear to you that I never —"

"Do not swear."

"But, Sire, do you then exile me?"

"Do you call that an exile, François? *Peste!* you are hard to please. What better thing could you hope for?"

D'Alençon bit his lips in despair.

"Faith!" continued Charles, affecting good-nature, "I did not think you were so popular, François, and particularly with the Huguenots. Why, they really petition

for you; and what better could I desire than a person devoted to me, a brother whom I love, and who is incapable of betraying me, at the head of a party who for thirty years has been in arms against us. This must calm everything as if by enchantment, to say nothing of the fact that we shall be all kings in the family. There will only be poor Henriot who will remain my friend, and nothing more. But he is not ambitious, and this title, which no one else covets, he will take."

"Oh, Sire, you mistake; I covet that title, — a title to which no one has such right as I have. Henri is your brother only by marriage; I am your brother by blood and in heart, and I entreat you, Sire, keep me near you."

"No, no, François," replied Charles, "that would be unfortunate for you."

"How, Sire?"

"For a thousand reasons."

"But, Sire, have you a more faithful companion than I am? From my childhood I have never left your Majesty."

"I know it well, I know it well; and sometimes I have wished you farther off."

"What means your Majesty?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing! I know; I know. Ah, what glorious hunting you will have there, François; how I shall envy you! Do you know they chase the bear in the mountains there, as we do the boar here? You'll send us magnificent skins. You know they hunt there with the poniard, wait for the animal, excite and irritate him; he goes towards the hunter, and four paces off he rises on his hind-legs. Then they plunge the steel into his heart, as Henri did to the wild boar at our last hunt. You know it is dangerous work; but you are brave, François, and the danger would be real pleasure to you."

"Ah! your Majesty increases my trouble, for I shall no more hunt with you."

"*Corbœuf!* so much the better," said the king; "it does not suit either of us to hunt together —"

"What means your Majesty?"

"To hunt with me causes you such pleasure, and creates in you so much emotion that you, who are skill personified, — you, who with any arquebuse can bring down a magpie at a hundred paces, — with a weapon of which you are such a perfect master failed at twenty paces to hit a wild boar, and broke the leg of my best horse! *Mort diable!* François, that makes one reflect, you must know!"

"Oh, Sire, think of my emotion," said D'Alençon, livid with agitation.

"Yes," replied Charles; "I guess what the emotion might be; and so I say, François, it is best for us to hunt at a distance from each other, for fear of such emotions. You might, you know, in another emotion, kill the horseman instead of the horse, the king instead of the animal! When Montgomery killed our father, Henri II., by accident, — emotion, perhaps, — the blow placed our brother François II. on the throne, and sent our father Henri to St. Denys; a little in this way can do so much."

The duke felt the perspiration pour down his brow at this unexpected attack. The king had surmised all, and veiling his anger under a jesting tone, was perhaps more terrible than if he had poured out, hot from his lips, the hatred that consumed his heart; his revenge was proportioned to his rancor. In proportion as the one was sharpened, the other increased; and for the first time, D'Alençon felt remorse, or rather regret, for having meditated a crime that had not succeeded. He had sustained the

struggle as long as he could; but at this last blow he bowed his head.

Charles fixed on him his vulture gaze, and watched closely every feeling that displayed itself in the young duke's countenance, as if he perused an open book. "Brother," said he, "we have declared our resolution; that resolution is immutable. You will go."

D'Alençon started; but Charles did not appear to observe it, and continued, "I wish that Navarre should be proud of having at its head a brother of the King of France. Gold, power, honor, — you will have all that belongs to your birth, as your brother Henri had; and, like him," he added with a smile, "you will bless me from a distance. But no matter! blessings know no distance!"

"Sire —"

"Accept, or rather resign yourself. Once a king, we shall find for you a wife worthy of a son of France, who may — who knows? — bring you another throne."

"But," observed the Duc d'Alençon, "your Majesty forgets your good friend Henri."

"Henri! — why, I told you he does not desire the throne of Navarre; he has abandoned it. Henri is a jovial fellow, and not a pale-face, like you; he likes to amuse himself and laugh at his ease, and not weary himself, as we are compelled to do who wear crowns upon our heads."

"Your Majesty then desires me to occupy myself —"

"By no means. Do not in any way disturb yourself; I will arrange everything myself. Say not a word to any one, and I will take upon myself to give publicity to everything. Go, François."

There was nothing to reply. The duke bowed and left the apartment, with rage devouring his heart. He

was eager to find Henri, and talk with him of all that had taken place; but he could find only Catherine, for Henri avoided, while his mother sought him. The duke, seeing Catherine, endeavored to swallow his griefs and tried to smile. "Well, Madame," he said, "do you know the great news?"

"I know that there is an idea of making a king of you, Monsieur."

"It is a great kindness on the part of my brother, Madame; and I am inclined to think that a portion of my gratitude is due to you, although I confess that at bottom it gives me pain thus to despoil the King of Navarre."

"You are very fond of Henriot, my son, it appears."

"Why, yes, for some time we have been closely allied."

"Do you suppose that he loves you as much as you love him?"

"I hope so, Madame."

"Such a friendship is edifying, do you know?—especially among princes. Friendships of the court are not generally very solid, my dear François."

"Mother, consider that we are not only friends, we are almost brothers."

Catherine smiled in a peculiar manner. "Are there brothers, then, among kings?" she asked.

"Oh, we were neither of us kings when our alliance began. We had no prospect of being kings; that is what brought us together."

"Yes; but things are changed now. Who can say that you will not both be kings?"

Catherine saw, by the start and sudden color of the duke, that the shaft had hit the mark.

"He? Henriot king? and of what kingdom?"

"The most glorious in Christendom, my son."

"Ah!" said D'Alençon, growing very pale, "what do you mean?"

"What a good mother should say to a son; what you have thought of more than once, François."

"I?" said the duke, "I have thought of nothing, Madame, I swear to you!"

"I believe you; for your friend, your brother Henri, as you call him, is, under his apparent frankness, a very clever and wily person, who keeps his secrets better than you do yours, François. For instance, did he ever tell you that Mouy was his man of business?" And Catherine looked at François as though she would read his very heart.

François had but one virtue, or rather but one vice, — dissimulation; he bore his mother's gaze unshrinkingly.

"Mouy!" said he, with surprise, and as if he uttered the name for the first time.

"Yes, the Huguenot, M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale, — he who nearly killed Maurevel, and who is intriguing and raising an army to support your brother Henri against your family."

Catherine, unaware that François knew as much on this matter as herself, rose at these words, and would have gone out majestically, but François detained her.

"Mother," he said, "another word, if you please. How can Henri, with his feeble resources, carry on any war serious enough to disquiet my family?"

"Child," said the queen, smiling, "he is supported by more than thirty thousand men, who, the day he says the word, will appear as suddenly as if they sprang forth from the ground; and these thirty thousand men are Huguenots, remember, — in other words, the bravest soldiers in the world. And then, he has a protector whom you have not been able, or have not chosen to conciliate."

"Who is that?"

"He has the king, — the king, who loves him, pushes him on; the king, who, from jealousy against your brother of Poland, and from spite against you, seeks a successor outside of his family."

"The king? Do you think so, Mother?"

"Do you not see how he takes to Henriot, his dear Henriot?"

"Yes, Madame; yes."

"And how he is repaid in return? for this very Henriot, forgetting how his brother-in-law would have shot him on Saint Bartholomew's day, grovels to the very earth like a dog, and licks the hand which has beaten him."

"Yes," said François, "Henri is very humble with my brother Charles; and as the king is always rallying him as to his ignorance of hawking, he has begun to study it. It was only yesterday he asked me if I had not some books on that sport."

"Well," said Catherine, whose eyes glittered as if a sudden project had occurred to her, — "well, and what reply did you make him?"

"That I would look in my library."

"Good! good!" answered Catherine; "he must have that book."

"But I have looked for it and cannot find it."

"I will find it; I will find it! and you will give it to him as coming from you."

"And what will that lead to?"

"Have you confidence in me, D'Alençon?"

"Yes, Mother."

"Will you obey me blindly in regard to Henri, whom you do not love, though you say you do?" D'Alençon smiled. "And whom I hate," continued Catherine.

"Yes, I will obey."

"Well, then, day after to-morrow come here for the book; I will give it to you, and you shall carry it to Henri, and —"

"And —"

"Leave the rest to Providence, or chance."

François bowed in acquiescence and left his mother's chamber.

Meantime Marguerite received through La Mole a letter from Mouy addressed to the King of Navarre. As in politics the two illustrious allies had no secrets, she opened the missive and read it, and then, going quickly and silently along the secret passage, went into the King of Navarre's antechamber, no longer guarded since Orthon's disappearance.

That disappearance, of which we have not spoken since the moment when the reader saw it take place in a manner so tragical for poor Orthon, had greatly disturbed Henri. He had spoken about it to Madame de Sauve and to his wife; but neither of them knew more about it than he did. Only, Madame de Sauve had given him some information which made it clear to his mind that the poor boy had fallen a victim to some machination of the queen-mother, and that his narrow escape from arrest at the same time with Mouy was due to the same machination.

Any other than Henri would have kept silence; but Henri calculated cleverly, and saw that his silence would betray him. And thus he sought and inquired for Orthon everywhere, even in the presence of the king and the queen-mother, and of every one, down to the sentinel at the wicket of the Louvre; but every inquiry was in vain. Henri appeared so affected by that loss, and so attached to the poor absent servitor that he declared that

he would not have another in his place until entirely satisfied that he would not return.

The antechamber was therefore unoccupied. Henri turned round as the queen entered. "You, Madame?" he cried.

"Yes," replied Marguerite; "read quickly!" and she handed the open letter to him. It contained these lines:

SIRE, — The moment has arrived for putting our plan of flight into execution.

Day after to-morrow there will be hawking on the banks of the Seine, from St. Germain to Maisons, all along the forest.

Go to this meeting, although it is only a hawking party. Put a good coat of mail under your doublet, your best sword by your side, and ride the fleetest horse in your stable.

About noon, when the sport is at its height, and the king is galloping after his falcon, get away alone, if you come alone; with the queen, if her Majesty will follow you.

Fifty of our party will be concealed in the Pavilion of François I., of which we have the key; no one will know that they are there, for they will come at night, and the shutters will be closed.

You will go by the Allée des Violettes, at the end of which I shall be on the watch; at the right of this road will be M.M. de la Mole and de Coconnas, with two horses, intended to replace yours if they should be fatigued.

Adieu, Sire! be ready, as we shall be.

"Now then, Sire," said Marguerite, "be a hero; it is not difficult. You have but to follow the route indicated, and create for me a glorious throne," said the daughter of Henri II.

An imperceptible smile rose to the thin lips of the Béarnais, as he kissed Marguerite's hand, and went out to explore the passage, humming the refrain of an old song:

"Cil qui mieux battit la muraille
N'entra point dedans le chasteau."

The precaution was good, for as he opened his bedchamber door the Duc d'Alençon opened that of his antechamber. Henri motioned to Marguerite with his hand, and then said aloud, "Ah, is it you, Brother? Welcome!"

The queen understood her husband's meaning, and went quickly into a dressing-closet, before the door of which hung a thick tapestry. D'Alençon entered with a timorous step, and looking around him, "Are we alone, Brother?" he asked in an undertone.

"Quite. But what ails you?—you seem upset."

"We are discovered, Henri!"

"How discovered?"

"Mouy has been arrested!"

"I know it."

"Well, Mouy has told the king all!"

"All what?"

"He said I was ambitious for the throne of Navarre, and was conspiring to obtain it."

"The dunderhead!" said Henri. "So that you are compromised, my dear brother! How is it, then, that you are not under arrest?"

"I cannot tell; the king jested with me, and offered me the throne of Navarre, hoping, doubtless, to draw from me a confession, but I said nothing."

"And you did well, *ventre-saint-gris!*" said the Béarnais. "Stand firm, for our lives depend on that."

"Yes," said François, "our position is difficult, and that is why I came to ask your advice, my brother. Ought I to flee or remain?"

"You have seen the king, and he has spoken to you?"

"Yes."

"Well, you must have ascertained his thoughts; act from your own inspiration."

"I would rather remain," said François.

Master of himself as he was, yet Henri allowed a movement of joy to escape him, and François observed it.

"Remain, then," said Henri.

"And you?"

"Why, if you remain, I have no motive for going; if you went I should follow you only out of devotion, — that I might not part from a brother I love."

"So, then," said D'Alençon, "there is an end of all our plans, and you give way to the first evil fortune."

"I?" said Henri, "I do not call it evil fortune to remain here; thanks to my contented disposition, I am happy everywhere."

"Well, then," observed D' Alençon, "there 's no more to be said; only, if you change your mind, let me know."

"*Corbleu!* I shall be sure to do that," replied Henri. "Have we not agreed to have no secrets from each other?"

D'Alençon said no more, and withdrew full of thought, for he believed he had seen the tapestry move at a certain moment; and indeed, scarcely was D'Alençon gone when Marguerite re-appeared.

"What do you think of this visit?" inquired Henri.

"That there is something new and important; what it is, I will learn."

"In the mean while?"

"In the mean while, fail not to come to my apartments to-morrow evening."

"I will not fail, be assured, Madame," was the reply of Henri, kissing his wife's hand very gallantly.

With the same precaution she had used in coming, Marguerite returned to her own apartments.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BOOK OF VENERY.

THIRTY-SIX hours had elapsed since the events we have related. The Louvre clock had just struck four when D'Alençon, who, with all the rest of the court, had risen early, to prepare for the hunt, entered his mother's apartments. The queen was not in her chamber, but she had left orders that if her son came he was to wait. At the end of a few minutes she came out of a cabinet where she carried on her chemical studies, and into which no one ever entered. As she opened the door, a strong odor of some acrid perfume pervaded the room, and looking through the door of the cabinet, the duke perceived a thick white vapor, like that of some aromatic substance, floating in the air. He could not restrain a look of inquiry.

"Yes," said Catherine, "I burned some old parchments, and their smell was so offensive that I cast some juniper into the brazier." D'Alençon bowed. "Well," continued the queen, concealing beneath the sleeves of her *robe de chambre* her hand stained with large reddish spots, "anything new since yesterday?"

"Nothing."

"Have you seen Henri?"

"Yes."

"Will he go?"

"He refuses positively."

"The knave!"

"What do you say, Madame?"

"I say that he will go."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then he escapes us?"

"Yes," said Catherine.

"And you let him depart?"

"I not only suffer him, but, I tell you, it is necessary that he should leave the court."

"I do not understand you."

"Listen: a skilful physician, the same who gave me the book of venery you are about to present to the King of Navarre, has told me that he is on the point of being attacked with consumption, — an incurable disease. Now, you will understand that if he be doomed to die of so cruel a disease, it is better that he should die away from us than under our eyes, at the court."

"Indeed, that would be too painful for us."

"Especially for Charles; whereas, if he die after having disobeyed him, he will look upon his death as a punishment from heaven."

"You are right, Mother," said François, with admiration; "it is better he should depart. But are you sure he will go?"

"All his measures are taken. The place of rendezvous is in the forest of St. Germain; fifty Huguenots are to escort him to Fontainebleau, where five hundred others await him."

"And does Margot accompany him?" asked D'Alençon.

"Yes; but upon Henri's death she will return to court, a widow and free."

"Are you sure that Henri will die?"

"The physician who gave me this book assured me of it."

"And where is this book?"

Catherine entered her cabinet, and returned instantly with the book in her hand.

"Here it is," said she.

D'Alençon looked at it, not without a certain feeling of terror.

"What is this book?" asked he, shuddering.

"I have already told you. It is a treatise on the art of rearing and training falcons, goshawks, and gerfalcons, written by a very learned man, — Seigneur Castruccio Castracani, of Lucca."

"What am I to do with it?"

"Give it to your good friend Henriot, who, you told me, asked you for this book, or one like it, that he might study the science of hawking. As he is going to hawk this morning with the king, he will not fail to read some pages of it, so as to show the king that he is following his advice and taking lessons. The main thing is to give it to him personally."

"Oh, I dare not!" said D'Alençon, shuddering.

"Why not?" replied the queen; "it is a book like any other, except that it has lain by so long that the leaves stick together. Do not attempt to read it, for it can only be read by wetting the finger, and turning over each leaf, which occasions a great loss of time."

"So that it will be read only by a man who is anxious to learn?"

"Exactly so, my son; you understand?"

"Oh," said D'Alençon, "I hear Henri in the court. Give it to me, and I will avail myself of his absence to place it in his room; on his return he will find it there."

"I should much prefer that you gave it to himself; it is more certain."

"I have already told you I dare not."

"Go, then; but at least place it where it can be easily seen."

"I will place it where he must see it. Will it be better to open it?"

"Yes, open it."

"Give it to me, then."

D'Alençon took with a trembling hand the book which Catherine held out to him with a hand that did not tremble.

"Take it," said she. "There is no danger, since I can handle it; besides, you have your gloves on."

D'Alençon wrapped the book in his mantle, as if still afraid.

"Make haste," continued the queen; "Henri may enter at any moment."

"You are right, Madame, I will go." And the duke left the apartment, trembling with emotion.

We have often introduced our readers into the apartments of the King of Navarre, and have made them witnesses of events that took place there, — joyous or terrible according as smiled or threatened the protecting angel of the future King of France. But those walls, stained with blood by murder, sprinkled with wine by revelry, scented with perfumes by love, had perhaps never seen a face so pale as the Duc d'Alençon's when he entered the apartments, the book in his hand.

On the wall hung Henri's sword; some links of mail were scattered on the floor; a well-filled purse and a poniard lay on the table; and the light ashes in the grate showed D'Alençon that Henri had put on a shirt of mail, collected what money he could, and burned all papers that might compromise him.

"My mother was right," thought D'Alençon. "He would betray me."

Doubtless this conviction gave him strength; for after having looked into all the corners and lifted the tapestry, after assuring himself that no one was thinking of what he might be doing, he took the book from under his cloak, placed it on the table, and then, with his gloved hand, and with a hesitation that betrayed his fears, he opened the book at an engraving. The instant he had done so he drew off his glove and cast it into the fire; the leather crackled, burned, and was soon reduced to a black and curled remnant. He waited until he had seen it consumed, and then hastily returned to his own apartments. As he entered he heard steps on the winding stair; and not doubting but that it was Henri, he quickly closed his door. Then he looked out of his window into the court below. Henri was not in that portion of the court visible from the window, and this strengthened François's belief that it was he whom he had just heard.

The duke sat down, took up a book, and tried to read. It was a History of France, from Pharamond to Henri II. But the duke could not fix his attention on it; the fever of expectation burned his veins; the throbbing of his temples sounded through all his brain. As one sees in a dream or in a magnetic trance, it seemed to him that he could see through the walls. His eyes appeared to plunge into the chamber of Henri, spite of the obstacles that separated it from him. In order to drive away the terrible object before his mind's eye, the duke vainly looked at his arms, his ornaments, his books; every detail of the engraving that he had seen but for a moment was before him still. It was a gentleman on horseback, recalling his falcon, in a flat landscape; then it was not only the book he saw, but the King of Navarre reading it, and wetting his thumb in order to turn over the pages. At this sight,

fictitious and imaginary as it was, D'Alençon staggered against a table and covered his eyes with his hands, as if to hide the horrible vision.

Suddenly D'Alençon saw Henri in the court. He stopped a few moments to speak to the men who were loading two mules, ostensibly with his provisions for the chase, but really with the money and other things he wished to take with him; then, having given his orders, he advanced towards the door.

D'Alençon stood motionless; it was not Henri, then, he had heard mount the stairs. All those agonies, then, that he had suffered in the last quarter of an hour were groundless. What he had thought finished, or nearly so, was only about to begin. He opened his door and listened; this time there was no mistake, — it was Henri. D'Alençon recognized his step, even to the peculiar jingle of his spurs. Henri's door opened, and then closed.

"Good!" said D'Alençon. "He has passed through the antechamber; he has entered his bedchamber; he has looked to see if his sword, his purse, and his poniard are there; then he has seen the book open on the table. 'What is this book?' he asks himself. 'Where has it come from? Who has brought it?' Then, seeing the engraving, he tries to read it and turns over the leaves." A cold sweat moistened the duke's brow. "Will he call for help?" said he. "Is the poison sudden? No; for my mother said he would die slowly of consumption."

Ten minutes passed by in these horrible reflections. D'Alençon could support it no longer; he rose, and passed through his chamber, which was already filled with gentlemen. "Good-day, gentlemen," said he, "I am going to the king." And to distract his attention, to prepare an *alibi*, perhaps, D'Alençon descended to his brother's apartments. Why, he knew not. What had he to say?

Nothing! It was not Charles he sought; it was Henri from whom he fled.

François crossed successively the salon and the sleeping-room, without meeting any one; he then thought Charles might be in his armory, and he opened the door.

Charles was seated at a table in an armchair of carved oak; his back was turned to the door by which François had entered. The duke approached silently. Charles was reading.

"*Pardieu!*" cried the king, "what an admirable book! I did not think there was such a work in France."

D'Alençon listened.

"Devil take the leaves!" said Charles, as, wetting his thumb, he turned them. "It seems as if the leaves had been stuck together purposely, to conceal the marvels they contain."

D'Alençon bounded forward. The book Charles was reading was the same that D'Alençon had taken into Henri's room. A cry burst from his lips.

"Ah, it is you, D'Alençon!" said the king; "you are just in time to see the most admirable work on venery in the world."

D'Alençon's first idea was to snatch the book from his brother, but an infernal thought nailed him to his place. A frightful smile passed over his white lips; he put his hand before his eyes as if dazzled. Then, gradually recovering himself, but without moving a step backward or forward, "Sire," he asked, "how did this book come into your possession?"

"Oh, I went into Henriot's room to see if he was ready, and found this treasure, which I brought down with me to read at my ease."

And the king again moistened his finger, and again turned over the page.

"Sire," faltered D'Alençon, whose hair stood on end,—"Sire, I have come to tell you——"

"Let me finish this chapter, François, and then tell me what you please. I have read, or rather devoured, fifty pages."

"My brother has tasted the poison five-and-twenty times," thought D'Alençon; "he is a dead man!"

François wiped the cold dew from his brow with a trembling hand, and waited in silence, as the king bade him, until he had finished the chapter.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HAWKING PARTY.

CHARLES read on; he seemed, indeed, to devour the pages. And each leaf, as we have said, whether because the book had been long exposed to dampness or for some other reason, adhered to the leaf next following.

D'Alençon gazed wildly on this terrible spectacle, of which he alone foresaw the consequence.

"Oh," murmured he, "what will happen now? Shall I go into exile and seek a visionary throne, while Henri, on the first intelligence of Charles's illness, will return to some fortress near Paris, whence he may come hither in an hour or two? so that before D'Anjou even hears of Charles's death the dynasty already will have been changed."

Instantly his plan with regard to Henri altered. It was Charles who had read the poisoned book; Henri must stay. He was less to be dreaded in the Bastille, or a prisoner at Vincennes, than as King of Navarre at the head of thirty thousand men.

The duke waited until Charles finished his chapter, and then, "Brother," said he, "I waited because you ordered me; but I have something of the greatest importance to say to you."

"Ah, the devil take you!" returned Charles, whose pale cheeks were becoming purple, either because he had read with too much fervor, or because the poison was be-

ginning to operate, "if you come and worry me, I'll get rid of you, as I have of the King of Poland."

"It is not on that subject I would speak to you. Your Majesty has touched me in my most sensitive point, — that of my love for you as a brother, and my devotion as your subject; and I come to prove to you that I am no traitor."

"Well, well," said Charles, crossing his legs and throwing himself back on his chair; "some fresh report, some new nightmare?"

"No, Sire; a certainty, — a plot, which only my ridiculous delicacy of sentiment has prevented my revealing to you."

"A plot! let us hear the plot."

"Sire," said François, "while your Majesty hawks in the plain of Vesinet, the King of Navarre will fly into the forest of St. Germain, where a troop of his friends await him, and will escape with them."

"I expected this!" cried Charles; "a fresh calumny against my poor Henriot! When will you leave him alone?"

"Your Majesty need not wait long to know whether what I say be true or false."

"Why not?"

"Because this evening he will be gone."

Charles rose. "Listen," said he; "I will once more seem to believe you; but mind, it is for the last time! Without there! summon the King of Navarre!"

A soldier was about to obey, when François stopped him. "That is a bad way to learn the truth," said he. "Henri will deny it, will give a signal, all his accomplices will conceal themselves, and my mother and myself will be accused of calumny."

Charles opened the window, for the blood was rushing

into his head. Then, turning to D'Alençon, "What would you do, then?" asked he.

"Sire," said D'Alençon, "I would surround the wood with three detachments of light-horse, who, at a certain hour, — at eleven o'clock, for example, — should beat the forest, and drive every one in it back upon the Pavilion of François I., which I would, as if casually, have appointed as the place for dinner. Then, when I saw Henri withdraw, I would follow him to the rendezvous, and capture him and his accomplices."

"A good idea enough!" returned Charles. "Call the captain of my guards."

D'Alençon drew from his doubtlet a silver whistle fastened to a chain of gold, and whistled. Nancey appeared. Charles gave him some orders in an undertone. Meanwhile Actæon, the greyhound, had dragged a book off the table and begun to tear it. Charles turned round and swore a terrible oath. The book was the precious treatise on venery, of which there existed but three copies in the world.

The chastisement was proportionate to the offence. Charles seized a whip and lashed the dog soundly; Actæon yelled and disappeared under a table covered with a large green cloth. The king picked up the book, and saw with joy that but one leaf was wanting, and that leaf not a page of text, but an engraving. He carefully placed it on a shelf beyond the reach of Actæon, — D'Alençon looking on with anxiety; now that it had fulfilled its fearful task, he would have been glad to see it out of Charles's hands.

Six o'clock struck, and the king descended. He first closed the door of the armory, locked it, and put the key in his pocket, D'Alençon earnestly watching each movement; on his way downstairs he stopped, and passed his

hand to his brow. "I do not know what is the matter with me," he said, "but I feel very weak."

D'Alençon's legs trembled not less than those of the king. "Perhaps," he faltered, "there is a thunder-storm in the air."

"A thunder-storm in January! you are mad," said Charles. "No, no; I feel a dizziness, my skin is dry. I am over-fatigued, that's all." Then in an undertone he added, "They will kill me with their quarrels and their plots."

The fresh air, the cries of the huntsmen, and the noise of the horses and hounds, produced their ordinary effect upon the king; he breathed freely, and felt exhilarated. His first care was to look for Henri and Marguerite, who seemed, excellent spouses, as if they could not leave each other. On perceiving Charles, Henri spurred his horse, and in three bounds was beside him.

"Ah, ah, Henriot!" said Charles, "you are mounted as if you were going to hunt the stag, and yet you know we are only going to hawk." Then without awaiting a reply, "Forward, gentlemen!" cried he, frowning, and with a voice almost threatening; "we must be at the meet by nine."

Catherine was watching at a window, and only her pale face could be seen; her figure was concealed by the curtain.

At Charles's order, the whole *cortége* passed through the gate of the Louvre, and along the road to St. Germain, amid the acclamations of the people, who saluted their young king as he rode by on his horse whiter than snow.

"What did he say to you?" asked Marguerite of Henri.

"He felicitated me on the stoutness of my horse."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"He knows something, then."

"I fear so."

"Let us be cautious."

Henri's face was lighted up in reply with one of his cordial smiles, which meant for Marguerite, especially, "Be easy, my dear."

As for Catherine, when she had seen them all depart, she let fall the curtain. "This time," she murmured, "I think I have him." Then, to satisfy herself, after having waited for a few minutes she entered the King of Navarre's apartments, using her pass-key. But she searched in vain for the book.

"D'Alençon has already taken it away," she said; "that is prudent." And she descended, convinced that this time her project had succeeded.

The king arrived at St. Germain. The sun, hitherto hidden by a cloud, lighted up the splendid *cortége.* Then, as if it had awaited this moment, a heron rose from the reeds with a mournful cry.

"Haw! haw!" cried Charles, unhooding his falcon.

The falcon, dazzled for a moment by the light, described a circle, then, suddenly perceiving the heron, dashed after it. However, the heron, which had risen a hundred yards before the beaters, had profited by the time occupied in unhooding the falcon to gain a considerable distance; he was therefore at least at a height of five hundred feet, and was still mounting rapidly.

"Haw! haw! Bec-de-Fer!" cried Charles, encouraging his falcon; "show us now your noble blood! haw! haw!"

As if he had understood that encouragement, the noble bird mounted like an arrow after the heron, which had now well-nigh disappeared.

"Ah, coward!" said Charles, putting his horse to its speed, and throwing back his head, so as not to lose sight of the chase; "courage, Bec-de-Fer!"

The contest was most curious. The falcon was rapidly nearing the heron; the only question was which in that first attack should be uppermost. Fear had better wings than courage. The falcon passed underneath; and the heron, profiting by his advantage, dealt him a blow with his long beak. The falcon staggered and seemed as if about to retreat, but soon recovering himself, went after the heron. The latter, pursuing his advantage, had changed the direction of his flight and sought the forest, endeavoring to escape by distance rather than by height; but the falcon followed him so closely that the heron was obliged again to mount, and in a few seconds the two birds were scarcely distinguishable.

"Bravo, Bec-de-Fer!" cried Charles, "see, he is uppermost!"

"Faith!" said Henri, "I confess I do not see the one or the other."

"Nor I," said Marguerite.

"If you can't see them, you may hear them, — at least the heron," replied Charles. "Hark! he asks quarter." As he spoke, two or three plaintive cries were heard. "Look, look!" he cried, "and you will see them descend quicker than they went up."

As the king spoke, the two birds reappeared; the falcon was uppermost.

"Bec-de-Fer has him!" shouted Charles.

The heron, outflown by the falcon, no longer sought to defend himself; he descended rapidly, struck continually by the falcon. Suddenly he folded his wings and dropped like a stone; but his adversary did the same. And when the fugitive resumed his flight, he received a stroke that stunned him; he fell to the earth, and the falcon, uttering a note of victory, alighted near him.

"To the falcon! to the falcon!" cried Charles, gallop

ing towards the place. But suddenly he stopped, and uttering a cry, let fall his bridle, and pressed his hand to his stomach. All the courtiers hastened up.

"It is nothing," said he, with inflamed features and haggard eyes. "But I felt as if a hot iron was passing through me just now; but it is nothing." And he galloped on.

D'Alençon turned pale.

"What is the matter now?" inquired Henri of Marguerite.

"I know not," replied she; "but did you see Charles? He was purple!"

"He is not so generally," said Henri.

They reached the place where the two birds were; the falcon was already eating the heron's brains. Charles sprang off his horse; but on alighting he was forced to seize the saddle to prevent himself from falling. The earth turned under him; he felt a strong inclination to sleep.

"My brother!" cried Marguerite, "what is the matter?"

"I feel," said Charles, "what Portia must have felt when she swallowed her burning coals. It seems as if my breath was flame."

Meantime the falcon was reclaimed, and all the suite gathered round Charles.

"What is all this?" cried he. "Body of Christ! it is nothing, or at most only the sun that affects me. Unhood all the falcons! there go a whole flight of herons!"

Five or six falcons were instantly unhooded, while all the chase galloped along the bank of the river.

"Well, Madame, what say you?" asked Henri.

"That the moment is favorable, and that if the king does not look back, we may easily gain the forest."

Henri called the attendant who had the fallen heron in charge, and while the court swept on, remained behind, as if to examine the bird. At this moment, and as if to aid his plans, a pheasant rose. Henri slipped the jesses of his falcon; he had now the pretext of a chase on his own account to assist him.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PAVILION OF FRANÇOIS I.

At the right of the Allée des Violettes is a long clearing, so far that it cannot be discovered from the high-road, but yet the high-road can be seen from the clearing.

In the middle of this clearing two men were lying on the grass, having a travelling-cloak spread beneath them, and at the side of each a long sword, and a musketoon (then called a petronel) with the muzzle turned from them. One of them was leaning on his knee and one hand, listening like a hare or a deer.

"It appears to me," said he, "that the hunt drew very close upon us just now. I heard the cries of the hunters as they cheered on the falcon."

"And now," said the other, who appeared to await events with much more philosophy than his comrade, — "now I hear them no longer; they must be a long way off. I have already remarked that this is a bad place for observation. It is true one is not seen here, but neither can one see."

"What the devil would you have, my dear Annibal? We must wait quietly; the place hides us and our mules and horses very well; Mouy has selected a good spot, one which has all the concealments and privacy indispensable to a conspirator."

"Ah, good!" said the other gentleman; "that's the word, is it? Well, I expected it. So, then, we are conspiring, are we?"

"We are not conspiring; we are serving the king and queen."

"Who are conspiring; and that, so far as we are concerned, comes to the same thing."

"Coconnas," replied La Mole, "I have already told you that I do not force you in the least degree to join me in this adventure, which a private sentiment unshared by you — and which you cannot share — urges me to undertake."

"Eh! *mordi!* who, then, says that you are forcing me? In the first place, I don't know a man who could force Coconnas into doing what he did n't wish to do; but do you suppose that I will let you go without following you, especially when I see you going to the devil?"

"Annibal! Annibal!" said La Mole, "I think I see down there her white horse. Oh! it is strange how the mere thought of her coming makes my heart beat!"

"Very odd!" said Coconnas, yawning; "my heart does n't beat at all."

"It was not she," said La Mole. "What has happened, then? It was appointed for noon, I think."

"It has happened that it is not noon," said Coconnas, "that is all; and it appears that we have time for a nap." And so saying, Coconnas stretched himself on his mantle like a man who is about to add practice to precept; but as his ear touched the ground, he raised his finger and motioned La Mole to be silent.

Then a distant sound was heard, which at first was scarcely perceptible, and to unpractised ears would have seemed to be only the wind, but to the cavaliers it was the distant galloping of horses.

La Mole sprang to his feet in a moment.

"Here they are!" said he. "Up!"

Coconnas rose more quietly; and then a regular and

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measured noise struck the ear of the two friends. The neighing of a horse made the horses they had ten paces distant prick up their ears; and in the road there passed like a white shadow a woman, who, turning towards them, made a particular signal and disappeared.

"The queen!" they exclaimed, both at once.

"What can this mean?" said Coconnas.

"And she did so with her arm," said La Mole, "which means, 'Immediately.'"

"She did so," said Coconnas, "which means, 'Depart.'"

"The signal means, 'Wait for me.'"

"It means, 'Away at once!'"

"Well," said La Mole, "let each act on his own conviction. Do you go; I will remain."

Coconnas shrugged his shoulders and lay down on the grass. At the same moment, in the opposite direction to that which the queen had followed, but in the same road, there passed at great speed a troop of horsemen whom the two friends recognized as Protestants. They disappeared rapidly.

"*Peste!* the thing becomes serious," said Coconnas, rising. "Let us go to the Pavilion of François I."

"No," replied La Mole; "by no means. If we are discovered, the attention of the king will be especially directed towards the pavilion, as that is the general rendezvous."

"Well, this time perhaps you are right," grumbled Coconnas.

Hardly had these words been uttered when a horseman passed like a flash of lightning amid the trees, and leaping over ditches, bushes, briars, and all obstacles, reached the young men. He had a pistol in each hand, and guided his horse in his furious career with his knees only.

"M. de Mouy!" exclaimed Coconnas, uneasy, and

now more on the alert than La Mole; "M. de Mouy flying! Is it a retreat, then?"

"Quick! quick!" cried the Huguenot; "away with you! All is lost! I have come round to tell you so. To horse and away!"

"And the queen?" cried La Mole.

But the voice of the young man was lost in space; Mouy was already too far away to hear him.

Coconnas had soon made up his mind. While La Mole remained motionless, following Mouy with his eyes as he disappeared among the branches, he hastened to the horses, and leaping on his own, threw the bridle of the other to La Mole, and prepared to dash off. "Come, come!" he exclaimed, "let us be off, as Mouy advises, and Mouy is a sensible man. Away, away, La Mole!"

"One moment," said La Mole; "we came here for something."

"Unless it is to get hanged," replied Coconnas, "I would advise you to lose no more time. When M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale flies, all the world may fly."

"M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale," said La Mole, "is not charged to carry off the Queen Marguerite! M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale does not love the Queen Marguerite!"

"*Mordi!* and he is quite right too, if that love were to lead him into such follies as I see you are meditating. May five hundred thousand devils of hell take the love which is likely to cost the lives of two brave gentlemen! '*Corne de bœuf!*' as King Charles says, we are conspiring, my dear fellow; and when men conspire, they should make off at the right time. Mount, mount, La Mole!"

"Escape, my dear fellow; I do not hinder you, — I even urge you. Your life is more valuable than mine; defend, then, your life."

"It were better to say, 'Coconnas, let us be hanged together,' and not, 'Coconnas, escape alone.'"

"Bah! my friend," replied La Mole, "the cord is made for vagabonds, and not for gentlemen like us."

"I begin to think," said Coconnas, with a sigh, "that the precaution I have taken is not bad."

"What is that?"

"To make a friend of the executioner."

"You are gloomy, Coconnas."

"But, in short, what are we to do?" said the latter, impatiently.

"We are going to find the queen."

"Where is she?"

"I don't know. We are to find the king."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know; but we shall find him, and shall do — we two — what fifty men have not been able, or have not dared to do."

"You appeal to my vanity, Hyacinthe; it is a bad sign."

"Well, well, let us, then, to horse and away!"

"That 's right."

La Mole turned round to lay his hand on the pommel of his saddle; but at the moment when he put his foot in the stirrup, a voice of command was heard, saying, "Halt there! surrender!"

At the same moment the figure of a man was seen behind an oak, then another, then thirty; they were the light dragoons dismounted, who were making their way quietly, and searching the forest.

"What did I tell you?" muttered Coconnas.

A muffled groan was La Mole's reply.

The light dragoons were within thirty paces of the two friends.

"Well, gentlemen," said the Piedmontese, "what is your pleasure?"

The lieutenant ordered his men to take aim at the two friends.

Coconnas continued in a low tone, "Mount, La Mole! there is time enough. Jump into your saddle as I have seen you do it a hundred times, and let us be off." Then, turning to the light dragoons, "Eh! what the devil, gentlemen, don't fire; you might kill friends." Then to La Mole, "Through the trees! their aim must be bad. They will fire, and miss us."

"Impossible," said La Mole. "We cannot take with us Marguerite's horse and the two mules. That horse and those mules would compromise her, while by my answers I will remove all suspicion. Go, my friend, go!"

"Gentlemen," said Coconnas, drawing his sword and raising it in the air, "we surrender."

The soldiers raised their muskets.

"But why are we summoned to surrender?"

"That you must ask of the King of Navarre."

"What crime have we committed?"

"M. d'Alençon will inform you."

Coconnas and La Mole looked at each other. The name of their enemy mentioned at such a moment was not reassuring. Yet neither of them made any resistance. Coconnas was desired to alight from his horse, a movement which he executed without a word; then they were both placed in the centre of the light dragoons, and took the route to the Pavilion of François I.

"You wished to see the Pavilion of François," said Coconnas to La Mole, when they saw through the trees the walls of a pretty Gothic building; "well, it seems that you are likely to see it."

La Mole made no reply, but only extended his hand to

Coconnas. By the side of this beautiful pavilion, built in the time of Louis XII., and which was called after François because he always made it a *rendezvous de chasse*, was a hut built for the huntsmen and prickers, and which was now nearly concealed by the muskets, halberds, and swords in front of it. The prisoners were conducted to this hut.

We will now throw a little light on the gloomy position of the two friends, by stating what had occurred. The Protestant gentlemen had assembled, as was agreed, in the Pavilion of François I., of which we know Mouy had the key. Masters of the forest, as they believed, they had placed sentinels here and there, whom the light dragoons, having exchanged their white scarfs for red ones (a precaution due to the ingenious zeal of M. de Nancey), had laid hands upon without striking a blow.

The light dragoons continued their quest, keeping a good watch over the pavilion; but Mouy, who, as we have seen, was awaiting the king at the end of the Allée des Violettes, had seen these red scarfs stealing along, and instantly suspected them. He hastily concealed himself, and remarked the vast circle they made in order to beat the forest and hem in the place of rendezvous. At the same moment, at the bottom of the principal alley, he had seen the white aigrettes and bright arquebuses of the king's body-guard, and then the king himself, while in the opposite direction he observed the King of Navarre. Then he had made a sign of a cross with his hat, which was the signal agreed upon to indicate that all was lost. At this signal the King of Navarre turned back, and rapidly disappeared. Then Mouy, digging the two large rowels of his spurs into the sides of his horse, fled like the wind, and as he fled, gave those words of advice to La Mole and Coconnas which we have mentioned.

Now, the king, having noticed the departure of Henri

and Marguerite, had come up, escorted by D'Alençon, expecting to see them both come from the hut, where he had desired all to be shut up who were found, not only in the pavilion, but in the forest.

D'Alençon, full of confidence, galloped close by the king, whose severe pain increased his ill-humor. Twice or thrice he had nearly fainted, and once had vomited blood. "Quick, quick!" he said, when he arrived. "Make haste; I want to return to the Louvre. Draw these heretics out of their lair. This is Saint Blaise's day, and he was cousin to Saint Bartholomew."

At these words of the king, all the pikes and arquebuses were in motion, and they compelled the Huguenots arrested in the forest or the pavilion to come out of the hut one after the other. But the King of Navarre, Marguerite, and Mouy were not among them.

"Well," said the king, "where is Henri? Where is Margot? You promised them to me, D'Alençon, and, *corbœuf!* I must have them found."

"We have not seen the King and Queen of Navarre," Sire," said M. de Nancey.

"But here they come," observed Madame de Nevers.

And at the same moment, at the farther extremity of a path which led down to the river appeared Henri and Marguerite, both as calm as if nothing had happened, — both with their falcons on their wrists, and lovingly side by side on their horses, as they galloped along, while their steeds, like themselves, seemed to be caressing each other.

It was then that D'Alençon, furious, commanded the forest to be searched, and that La Mole and Coconnas were discovered. They had reached the circle which the guards closed in; only, as they were not sovereigns, they could not assume so cool an appearance as Henri and Marguerite. La Mole was too pale, and Coconnas was too red.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE EXAMINATIONS.

The spectacle which presented itself to the friends, as they entered, was one of those that are never forgotten, though seen but once and for an instant. As we have already said, Charles had anxiously observed each prisoner as, one by one, they left the hut, expecting with an intensity of interest equal to that of D'Alençon, to see the King of Navarre come forth. Their expectation was disappointed. But that was not enough; they must know what had become of him.

When, therefore, Henri and Marguerite were seen approaching from the end of a path, a mortal paleness seized D'Alençon, while the breast of Charles seemed to expand; for instinctively he wished that all that his brother had constrained him to do might fall back on D'Alençon himself.

"He will escape again!" murmured François, turning pale.

But at this moment the king was seized with such excruciating pains, such spasmodic agony throughout his frame that pressing a hand on each side, he shrieked aloud like a delirious man.

Henri hastened towards him; but by the time he had crossed the space that separated them, the paroxysm had passed away.

"Whence come you, Monsieur?" inquired the king, with a sternness of manner that frightened Marguerite.

"Why, from the chase, my brother," she replied.

"The chase was on the river-bank, and not in the forest."

"Sire," said Henri, "my falcon suddenly struck down a pheasant, at the very time when we had stopped to see the heron."

"And where is the pheasant?"

"Here it is, Sire; a fine bird, is it not?" And Henri, with his most innocent manner, presented to Charles his bird with the plumage of purple, red, and gold.

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed Charles; "but why did you not rejoin me when you had secured the pheasant?"

"Because the bird had directed his flight towards the park, Sire; so that when we returned to the river's side, we saw you more than a mile off, proceeding towards the forest. So we galloped after you, for since we belonged to your Majesty's hunting-party, we didn't like to lose it."

"And were all these gentlemen invited also?" inquired Charles.

"What gentlemen?" inquired Henri, casting a look of inquiry around him.

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed Charles; "why, your Huguenot friends. They certainly have not been invited by me."

"No, Sire," answered Henri, "but perhaps they come at the bidding of M. d'Alençon."

"Mine?" said the Duc d'Alençon.

"Why, yes, Brother," returned Henri; "did you not announce yourself yesterday as King of Navarre? Well, the Huguenots who have sought you for their king have come to thank you for accepting the crown, and the king for giving it. Is it not so, gentlemen?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted a number of voices. "Long live the Duc d'Alençon! long live King Charles!"

"I am not King of the Huguenots!" said François, white with rage; and looking stealthily at Charles, he added, "And trust I never shall be!"

"No matter," interposed Charles; "you know, Henri, that I look upon all this as very strange."

"Sire," cried the King of Navarre, firmly, "it looks — God forgive me! — as if I were undergoing an examination!"

"And if it were so, how would you answer?"

"That I am a king like yourself," replied Henri, proudly, "for it is not the crown, but birth, that confers royalty; and that I will answer to my brother and to my friend, but never to my judge."

"I only wish," muttered Charles, "that for once in my life I could hit upon what it was right to do."

"M. de Mouy is doubtless among those persons secured," cried the Duc d'Alençon. "Let him be brought before your Majesty; we shall then know all we require."

"Is M. de Mouy among the prisoners?" inquired the king.

Henri felt a momentary uneasiness, and exchanged glances with Marguerite; but it was of short duration.

No voice answered to the inquiry after Mouy.

"He is not among the parties arrested," said M. de Nancey; "some of my men fancy they saw him, but no one is certain on the subject."

An oath escaped from the lips of D'Alençon.

"Ha!" cried Marguerite, pointing to La Mole and Coconnas, who had heard all that had passed, and on whose wit and intelligence she felt sure she might reckon; "here, Sire, are two gentlemen in the service of M. d'Alençon. Question them; they will reply to you."

The duke felt the blow.

"I had them arrested purposely, to be enabled to prove

that they neither of them belonged to me," answered the duke.

The king contemplated the two friends, and started at seeing La Mole again.

"Oh! oh! still that Provençal," said he.

Coconnas gracefully saluted.

"What were you doing when you were arrested?" asked Charles.

"Sire, we were planning deeds of love and war."

"What, with horses ready saddled, armed to the teeth, and every preparation made for flight?"

"Not so, Sire," replied Coconnas; "your Majesty is misinformed. We were lying beneath a sheltering beech, *sub tegmine fagi*, and might easily have ridden away had we entertained the slightest suspicion that we had been so unfortunate as to offend your Majesty. Now, gentlemen," continued he, turning towards the light-horsemen, "say candidly and fairly, on your honor as soldiers, could we or could we not have escaped, had such been our desire?"

"The fact is," answered the lieutenant, "that neither of these cavaliers made the slightest attempt at flight."

"Because their horses were too far off," said the Duc d'Alençon.

"Your pardon, Monseigneur," responded Coconnas, "but mine was under me, and my friend, Comte Lerac de la Mole, held his by the bridle."

"Is this true, gentlemen?" asked the king.

"It is true, Sire," replied the lieutenant; "upon seeing us approach, M. de Coconnas even got off his horse."

Coconnas looked at the king with a grim smile that seemed to say, "There, you see!"

"But what did all those led horses, those mules laden with cases and packages, signify, then?" demanded François.

"How can we tell you?" replied Coconnas; "we are neither grooms nor squires. Ask these questions of the varlet who had charge of them."

"He is not to be found!" exclaimed the duke, furious.

"Most likely he was frightened, and ran away," retorted Coconnas; "one cannot expect a clown to have the self-possession of a gentleman."

"Still the same system," said D'Alençon, grinding his teeth. "Fortunately, Sire, I told you beforehand that neither of these persons had been in my service for some days past."

"Is it possible," cried Coconnas, "that I have the misfortune no longer to form part of your Highness's retinue?"

"*Morbleu!* Monsieur, you know that better than any one, since you yourself gave in your dismissal in a letter so impertinent that I have thought proper to preserve it, and happily have it about me."

"Oh!" said Coconnas, "I hoped that your Highness had forgiven me for writing that letter under an impulse of vexation. I had just learned that your Highness had endeavored to strangle my friend La Mole in one of the corridors of the Louvre."

"What is that he says?" interrupted the king.

"At first I thought your Highness was alone in the affair; but afterwards I learned that three other persons —"

"Silence!" exclaimed Charles, "we have heard enough." Then, turning to the King of Navarre, he said, "Henri, your word not to escape?"

"I give it to your Majesty."

"Return to Paris with M. de Nancey, and remain in your chamber under arrest. As for you, Messieurs," continued he, speaking to the two friends, "give up your swords."

La Mole looked at Marguerite, who smiled; the young

man immediately delivered his sword to the nearest officer, Coconnas following his friend's example.

"Has M. de Mouy been found?" inquired the king.

"No, Sire," answered M. de Nancey; "either he was not in the forest, or he has escaped."

"So much the worse," rejoined Charles; "but let us return to Paris. I am cold, and my head seems dizzy."

"'T is anger that excites you, Sire," observed François.

"It may be; but my eyes seem troubled. Where are the prisoners? I cannot distinguish anything. Is it so soon dark? Oh, mercy! help! help! I die! I die!"

So saying, the unfortunate king let go the reins of his horse, and fell backwards, wildly stretching forth his hands; while his terrified courtiers, alarmed at this sudden seizure, supported him.

Standing apart from the clustering nobles, François wiped the cold drops from his brow; for he alone of all the company knew the cause of Charles's violent attack. On the other side, the King of Navarre, already under the guard of M. de Nancey, looked on with increasing astonishment. "Eh! eh!" he murmured with that wonderful intuition which sometimes made him a man inspired, so to speak, "am I to find myself fortunate in being arrested in my flight?" He looked at Margot, whose eyes, dilated by surprise, wandered from him to the king, and from the king to him.

This time the king became insensible. A litter was brought, and he being extended on it was covered with a cloak taken from the shoulders of one of his attendants. The melancholy procession then proceeded towards Paris in a very different frame of mind from that in which it had departed thence in the morning. Then, a merry, jocund party had set forth, consisting of conspirators whose hearts beat high with hope, and a joyous monarch,

promising himself many such days of princely enjoyment; their return displayed a dying king surrounded by rebel prisoners.

Marguerite, who throughout all this had not for an instant lost her self-possession, gave her husband a look of intelligence, then, passing so close to La Mole that he was enabled to catch the two brief words she uttered, she said, "Me deide" ("Fear nothing").

"What did she say?" asked Coconnas.

"She told me to fear nothing."

"So much the worse," murmured the Piedmontese; "so much the worse. It means that we are in a bad predicament. Every time when that word has been addressed to me encouragingly, I have received at the same moment a bullet somewhere, a sword-thrust in my body, or a pot of flowers on my head. 'Fear nothing,' whether spoken in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or French, I always understand to mean, 'Look out, down there!'"

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed the captain of light-horse, "we are ready to start."

"Would it be a liberty," inquired Coconnas, "to ask where we are going?"

"I believe to Vincennes," replied the lieutenant.

"I would rather be going anywhere else," answered Coconnas; "but people are sometimes obliged to do things against their will."

The king recovered his senses during the journey, and even a portion of his strength. He declared himself equal to remounting his horse, but that was not permitted.

"Let Maître Ambroise Paré be immediately summoned," said Charles, as he reached the Louvre. Then, descending from his litter, he walked slowly towards his apartments, leaning on the arm of Tavannes, and strictly forbidding any one to follow him.

All had observed his extreme gravity of look and manner. During the journey homewards he had appeared lost in reflection, not addressing a word to those around him. Still it was evident that the recently discovered conspiracy was not the subject of his thoughts, but that he was solely occupied with his own illness, — a malady so strange, so sudden and severe, the symptoms of which reminded the spectators of those observed in the last sickness of François II.

Arrived in his chamber, Charles seated himself on a species of lounge, and supported his head on the cushions; then reflecting that there might be some little delay before the arrival of Maître Ambroise Paré, he determined to utilize his time while waiting. He clapped his hands; a guard appeared.

"Let the King of Navarre be informed that I desire to speak with him," said Charles.

The man bowed and departed.

The king was visited by a repetition of the distressing sufferings he had previously undergone. His head fell back; his ideas were crowded and confused till he could not separate one from the other; a sort of blood-colored vapor seemed to float before his eyes; his mouth was parched, and he had already, without quenching his thirst, emptied a *carafe* of water. During the almost lethargic state into which he had sunk, a sudden noise was heard of approaching footsteps; the door rolled back on its hinges, and Henri entered. M. de Nancey was following him, but remained in the antechamber. The King of Navarre waited till the door was closed behind him, and then went forward. "You sent for me, Sire," said he. "I am here."

The sound of the well-known voice effectively roused Charles, who, raising his languid head mechanically, held out his hand to Henri.

"Sire," observed Henri, whose hands remained at his sides, "your Majesty forgets that I am no longer your brother, but your prisoner."

"True, true," answered Charles, "and I thank you for having reminded me of it; but was there not also some promise on your part to answer me frankly when we should be alone?"

"I am ready to keep that promise. Question me, Sire."

The king poured some water into the palm of his hand and applied it to his temples. "First, then," said he, "tell me truly, Henri, how much of the charge brought against you by the Duc d'Alençon is true?"

"Half of it only. It was M. d'Alençon who was to have fled, and I who was to have accompanied him."

"And why should you have done so, Henri? Are you dissatisfied with my conduct towards you?"

"Far from it, Sire. Your Majesty is all goodness; and that God who reads the hearts of men sees in mine the deep affection I bear to my brother and my king."

"Yet," said Charles, "it seems to me not natural to fly from those we love, and who love us."

"So," said Henri, "I was not flying from those who love me, but from those who hate me. Am I permitted to speak openly?"

"Speak, Monsieur."

"Those here who hate me, Sire, are M. d'Alençon and the queen-mother."

"As for M. d'Alençon, I will not say you are wrong; but the queen-mother loads you with attentions."

"And it is precisely for that reason that I mistrust her; and a very good thing it is I was on my guard."

"Against the queen-mother?"

"Ay, the queen-mother, or those who are about her. You know that the misfortune of kings, Sire, is not always

in being served too inefficiently; it sometimes consists in being served with too much zeal."

"Explain yourself. You have engaged yourself to tell me everything."

"And your Majesty wishes me to do so?"

"Continue."

"Your Majesty loves me, you have said?"

"That is to say, I did love you before your treason, Henriot."

"Let us suppose that you love me still, Sire."

"Very well."

"If you love me you will wish me to live, will you not?"

"I should have been in despair had misfortune overtaken you."

"Well, Sire, on two occasions your Majesty has barely escaped falling into despair."

"How is that?"

"Yes, for twice Providence alone saved my life. It is true that on the second occasion Providence assumed the features of your Majesty."

"And in what form did Providence appear on the first occasion?"

"In that of a man who would be astonished at finding himself identified with Providence, — that of René. Yes; you, Sire, saved me from death by steel —"

Charles frowned, for he remembered the night when he had taken Henriot to the Rue des Barres. "And René?" he said.

"René saved me from death by poison."

"You are lucky, Henriot," said the king, attempting a smile, which sudden pain changed to a nervous contraction; "it is not his business."

"Two miracles, then, have saved me, Sire, — a miracle

of repentance on the part of the Florentine, a miracle of goodness on your part. Well, I confess to your Majesty my fear that Heaven may grow weary of working miracles, and I have wished to flee in obedience to the maxim, 'Help yourself, and Heaven will help you.'"

"Why have you not told me this before, Henri?"

"Had I said these words to you yesterday, I should have been an informer."

"And in saying them to-day?"

"To-day it is another matter; I am accused, and I defend myself."

"Are you sure about that first attempt, Henriot?"

"As sure as of the second."

"And they really tried to poison you?"

"They attempted it."

"With what?"

"With an opiate."

"And how can any one poison with an opiate?"

"Well, Sire, ask René. They can poison even with gloves."

Charles bent his brows; but by degrees the frown disappeared. "Yes, yes," he said, as if talking to himself, "it is the nature of created beings to flee from death; why, then, should not intelligence do what is done by instinct?"

"Well, Sire," said Henri, "have I been frank enough for you, and are you satisfied that I have told you all?"

"Yes, Henriot, yes; and you are a brave fellow. And you think, then, that your enemies have not given up, and that new attempts will be made against you?"

"Sire, every evening I am surprised to find myself still alive."

"It is because they know that I love you, Henriot, that they wish to kill you; but make yourself quite easy.

They shall be punished for their evil intentions; meanwhile, you are free."

"Free to leave Paris?" asked Henri.

"No, no! you are well aware I cannot possibly do without you. Thousand names of a devil! I must have some one who loves me."

"Then if your Majesty prefers keeping me with you, at least grant me one favor."

"What is that?"

"Not to entertain me as a friend, but to detain me as a prisoner."

"A prisoner?"

"Eh! yes. Does not your Majesty see that it is your friendship that ruins me?"

"And you would prefer my hatred?"

"An apparent hatred, Sire. That hatred will save me. Let them see me in disgrace, and they will not care so much to see me dead."

"Henriot," said Charles, "I don't know what you wish, — I don't know what purpose you have in view; but if your wishes are not fulfilled, if you fail in accomplishing your purpose, I shall be much surprised."

"I may, then, rely on the severity of the king?"

"Yes."

"Then I shall be less uneasy. But what are your Majesty's orders?"

"Return to your apartments, Henriot. As for me, I am suffering. I will see my dogs, and go to bed."

"Sire," said Henri, "your Majesty should summon a physician. Your illness is perhaps more serious than you think."

"I have sent for Maître Ambroise Paré."

"Then I shall retire more satisfied."

"Upon my soul," said the king, "I verily believe that

of all my family you are the only person who really loves me!"

"Is such your opinion, Sire?"

"Yes, upon my word."

"Very well. Give me in charge to M. de Nancey as a man to whom your anger allows only a month to live; it is a way to provide for my loving you a long time."

"M. de Nancey!" cried Charles.

The captain of the guards entered.

"M. de Nancey," said Charles, "I here commit to your keeping the most guilty man in my kingdom; you will answer for him with your life."

The officer bowed low; and with an air of consternation Henri followed him from the apartment.

CHAPTER XXII.

ACTÆON.

Charles was alone, and much astonished not to have seen either of his faithful attendants, — his nurse Madelon and his greyhound Actæon.

"Nurse has gone to sing her psalms with some Huguenot of her acquaintance," he said to himself; "and Actæon is still angry with me for the blow I gave him with my whip this morning."

Charles then took a wax candle, and went into the nurse's apartment. She was not there, and he passed on into his armory; but as he went forward, a violent illness, such as he had already experienced, suddenly seized him. He suffered as if his entrails were perforated with a hot iron; an unquenchable thirst consumed him, and seeing a cup of milk on the table, he swallowed it at a draught. He then felt somewhat easier, and entered the armory. To his great astonishment, Actæon did not come to meet him. Had he been shut up? In that case he would have known that his master had returned from hunting, and would have howled to rejoin him.

Charles called, whistled; the animal did not appear. He advanced four paces, and as the light of the wax candle threw its beams to a corner of the cabinet, he saw a large mass extended on the floor. "Holloa, Actæon, holloa!" said he, whistling again.

The dog did not move. Charles hastened forward and touched him; the poor brute was stiff and cold. From his throat, contracted by pain, several drops of bile had

fallen, mingled with a foamy and bloody slaver. The dog had found in the cabinet an old cap of his master's, and had died with his head resting on something that represented a friend.

At this spectacle, which made him forget his own sufferings, and restored to him all his energy, rage boiled in Charles's veins. He would have cried out, but encompassed in their greatness as they are, kings are not free to yield to that first impulse in passion or in danger. He reflected that there might be some treason here, and was silent.

Charles knelt before his dog, and examined the dead carcass with an experienced eye. The eye was glassy, the tongue red, and covered with pustules; it was a strange disease, and made Charles shudder. He put on his gloves, opened the livid lips of the dog to examine the teeth, and remarked in the interstices some white-looking fragments clinging about the points of his sharp teeth. He took these fragments out, and at once saw that they were paper; near where the paper was, the inflammation was more violent, the gums were more swollen, and the skin appeared as if eaten by vitriol.

Charles looked around him attentively. On the carpet were lying several pieces of paper similar to that which he had already found in the dog's throat; one of the bits, larger than the others, presented the marks of an engraving on wood. Charles's hair stood erect on his head; he recognized a fragment of the engraving which represented a gentleman hawking, and it was that which Actæon had torn out of his book of venery.

"Ah," said he, turning pale, "the book was poisoned!" Then, suddenly calling up his recollections, "Thousand devils! I touched every page with my finger; and at every page I raised my finger to my lips to moisten it.

These faintings — these pains — these vomitings! I am a dead man!" He remained for an instant motionless under the weight of this frightful idea; then, raising himself with a hoarse groan, he went hastily towards the door. "Let some one go instantly and with all despatch," he cried, "to Maître René, and bring him here in ten minutes. Let one of you mount a horse and lead another one, that you may return the sooner. If Maître Ambroise Paré arrives, desire him to wait."

A guard started off on the run to obey the king's commands.

"Ah," muttered Charles, "if I put everybody to the torture, I will learn who gave this book to Henriot!" and with the perspiration on his brow, his hands clinched, his breast heaving, Charles remained with his eyes fixed on the body of his dead dog. Ten minutes afterwards, the Florentine rapped timidly and with some uneasiness at the king's door. There are certain consciences to which the sky is never clear.

"Enter!" said Charles.

The perfumer appeared. Charles went towards him with an imperious air and compressed lip.

"Your Majesty desired to see me," said René, trembling.

"You are a skilful chemist, are you not?"

"Sire —"

"And know all that the most skilful doctors know?"

"Your Majesty is pleased to flatter me."

"No, my mother tells me so; and, besides, I have confidence in you, and would rather consult you than any one else. Look!" he continued, pointing to the carcass of the dead dog; "I beg you to look at that animal's mouth, and tell me of what death he has died."

While René, with a wax candle in his hand, was stoop-

ing down to the ground, as much to hide his emotion as to obey the king, Charles, standing up, with his eyes fixed on him, awaited with a feverish expectation easily to be imagined the reply which would be his sentence of death or his assurance of safety.

René drew a kind of scalpel from his pocket, opened it, and with the point detached from the dog's mouth the morsels of paper adhering to the gums, looking long and attentively at the bile and blood exuding from the sore spots.

"Sire," he said in a tremulous voice, "here are very sad symptoms."

Charles felt an icy shudder run through his veins, and to his very heart. "Yes," he exclaimed; "the dog has been poisoned, has he not?"

"I fear so, Sire."

"And with what sort of poison?"

"I think a mineral poison."

"Can you ascertain to a certainty whether or not he has been poisoned?"

"Yes, on opening and examining the stomach."

"Open it, then; I wish the matter to be settled beyond doubt."

"I must call some one to assist me."

"I will assist you," said Charles. "If he has been poisoned, what symptoms shall we find?"

"Red blotches and herborizations in the stomach."

"Come, then, to work!"

René, with one stroke of the scalpel, opened the hound's body, while Charles, with one knee on the ground, held the light with a clinched and convulsive hand.

"See, Sire," said René; "see, here are evident traces. Here are the red blotches I mentioned; and these veins, turgid with blood, resembling the roots of certain plants,

are what I meant by herborizations. I find here every symptom I anticipated."

"So the dog was poisoned?"

"Unquestionably, Sire."

"With mineral poison?"

"According to every appearance."

"And what would be a man's symptoms who by accident had swallowed such poison?"

"Great pains in the head, a feeling of burning in the stomach, as if he had swallowed hot coals, pains in the bowels, and vomiting."

"Would he be thirsty?" asked Charles.

"Parchingly thirsty."

"'Tis so, then; 't is so, then," muttered the king.

"Sire, I search in vain for the object of all these inquiries."

"Why search for it? You have no need to know. Only answer my questions."

"Let your Majesty question me."

"What is the antidote to administer to a man who had swallowed the same substance as my dog?"

René reflected an instant. "There are many mineral poisons," he replied; "and I should like to know precisely to what poison the inquiry relates. Has your Majesty any idea of the mode in which the poison was conveyed to the dog?"

"Yes," said Charles; "he has eaten the leaf of a book."

"The leaf of a book?"

"Yes."

"And has your Majesty that book?"

"Here it is," was Charles's answer, taking the hunting-book from the shelf where he had placed it, and handing it to René. René gave a start of surprise, which did not escape the king's notice.

"He has eaten a leaf of this book?" stammered René.

"Yes, this one;" and Charles pointed out the torn leaf.

"Allow me to tear out another, Sire."

"Do so."

René tore out a leaf and held it to the wax candle. When it was lighted a strong smell of garlic diffused itself through the apartment. "He has been poisoned with a preparation of arsenic," he said.

"You are sure?"

"As if I had prepared it myself."

"And the antidote?"

René shook his head.

"What!" said Charles, in a hoarse voice, "do you know no remedy?"

"The best and most efficacious is white of eggs beaten in milk; but —"

"But what?"

"It must be instantly administered; if not —"

"If not —"

"It is a terrible poison, Sire," replied René.

"Yet it does not kill at once?" said Charles.

"No, but it kills surely, — no matter how long the person is in dying, though sometimes that may be reduced to a calculation."

Charles leaned on the marble table. "Now," said he, touching René on the shoulder, "you know this book."

"I, Sire?" replied René, turning pale.

"Yes, you; for you betrayed yourself when you saw it."

"Sire, I swear to you —"

"Listen to me, René, and listen attentively. You poisoned the Queen of Navarre with gloves; you poisoned the Prince de Porcian with the smoke of a lamp; you

tried to poison M. de Condé with a scented apple. René, I will have your flesh torn off your bones, shred by shred, with red-hot pincers, if you do not tell me to whom this book belongs."

The Florentine saw that he must not trifle with Charles's anger, and resolved to reply with audacity. "And if I tell the truth, Sire, who will guarantee me from not being more cruelly tortured than if I hold my tongue?"

"I will."

"Will you give me your royal word?"

"On my honor as a gentleman, your life shall be spared," said the king.

"Then this book belongs to me."

"To you?" replied Charles, starting, and gazing on him with bewildered eye.

"Yes, to me."

"And how did it leave your hands?"

"Her Majesty the Queen-mother took it from my house."

"The queen-mother?" exclaimed Charles.

"Yes."

"And with what intention?"

"With the intention, as I believe, of having it sent to the King of Navarre, who had asked the Duc d'Alençon for a book of this description, that he might study hawking."

"Ah!" said Charles, "and is that it? I understand it all. This book, indeed, was in Henriot's chamber. There is a destiny, and I submit to it."

At this moment Charles was seized with a dry and violent cough, followed by another attack of pain in the stomach; he uttered two or three stifled groans, and fell back in his chair.

"What ails you, Sire?" asked René, alarmed.

"Nothing," said Charles, "except great thirst. Give me something to drink."

René poured out a glass of water, and presented it to Charles, who swallowed it at a draught. "Now," said he, taking a pen, and dropping it into the ink, "write in this book."

"What shall I write?"

"What I dictate: 'This book on hawking was given by me to the queen-mother, Catherine de Médicis. RENÉ.'"

The Florentine wrote and signed as he was commanded.

"You promised my life should be saved," said René.

"And on my part, I will keep my word."

"But," said René, "as to the queen-mother?"

"Oh," replied Charles, "that I have nothing to do with. If you are attacked, defend yourself."

"Sire, may I quit France when I find my life menaced?"

"I will reply to that in two weeks."

"But in the mean time —"

Charles bent his brows, and placed his finger on his livid lips.

"Rely on me, Sire," said René, who, too happy to escape so well, bowed, and left the room.

On René's departure the nurse appeared at her chamber door. "What is the matter, my Charlot?" she inquired.

"Nurse, I have been walking in the dew, and it has made me ill."

"You look very pale, Charlot."

"And feel very weak. Give me your arm, Nurse, as far as the bed;" and leaning on her, Charles went to his chamber.

"Now," said Charles, "I will put myself to bed without assistance."

"And if Maître Ambroise Paré comes?"

"You must tell him I am better and do not want him."

"But meanwhile what will you take?"

"Oh, a very simple medicine, — whites of eggs beaten in milk. By the way, Nurse, poor Actæon is dead; tomorrow morning have him buried in a corner of the garden of the Louvre. He was one of my best friends, and I will raise a tomb over him, — if I have time."

CHAPTER XXIII.

VINCENNES.

According to the order given by Charles IX., Henri was the same evening conducted to Vincennes, that famous castle of which only a fragment now remains, — a fragment colossal enough to give an idea of its past grandeur.

At the postern of the prison they stopped. M. de Nancey alighted from his horse, opened the gate closed with a padlock, and respectfully invited the king to follow him. Henri obeyed without a word of reply. Every abode seemed to him safer than the Louvre, and ten doors closing on him were ten doors between him and Catherine de Médicis.

The royal prisoner crossed the drawbridge between two soldiers, passed the three doors on the ground-floor and the three doors at the foot of the staircase, and then, still preceded by M. de Nancey, went up one flight of stairs. Arrived there, the captain of the guards, seeing that Henri was about to ascend still higher, said to him, "Monseigneur, halt!"

"Ah, ah!" said Henri, pausing; "it seems they will honor me with a place on the first floor."

"Sire," said M. de Nancey, "you will be treated as a crowned king."

"The devil!" said Henri to himself; "two or three stories higher would have been no humiliation to me. I

shall be too comfortable here. They will surely suspect something."

"Is your Majesty willing to follow me?" said M. de Nancey.

"*Ventre-saint-gris!*" said the King of Navarre, "Monsieur, here there is no question of what I wish or do not wish; the question is, what does my brother Charles order? Does he order me to follow you?"

"Yes, Sire."

"In that case I follow you, Monsieur."

They entered a sort of corridor, at the extremity of which was a very large and gloomy chamber; Henri looked round him with considerable disquietude. "Where are we?" he inquired.

"In the chamber of torture, Monseigneur."

"Ah, ah!" replied the king; and he looked around with more interest.

There was a little of everything in this chamber, — pitchers and trestles for the torture by water; wedges and mallets for the torture of the boot; moreover, there were stone benches for the unhappy wretches who awaited the torture, nearly all round the chamber; and above these seats, below them and on a level with them, were iron rings mortised into the walls.

"Ah, ah!" said Henri; "shall we soon reach my apartment?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; and here it is," said a figure in the dark, who approached and became distinguishable.

Henri thought he recognized the voice, and advancing, said, "Ah, is it you, Beaulieu? And what the devil are you doing here?"

"Sire, I have just been appointed governor of the fortress of Vincennes."

"Well, my dear friend, your *début* does you honor; a king for a prisoner is no bad beginning."

"Pardon me, Sire, but before I received you I had already received two gentlemen."

"Who may they be? Ah, your pardon! Perhaps I commit an indiscretion?"

"Monseigneur, I have not been bound to secrecy. They are M. de la Mole and M. de Coconnas."

"Ah, it is true; I saw them arrested, those poor gentlemen. And how do they sustain their great misfortune?"

"Very differently, Sire; the one is gay, the other sad, — one sings, the other groans."

"And which of them groans?"

"M. de la Mole, Sire."

"Faith!" said Henri. "I understand better him who groans than him who sings. After what I have seen of it the prison does n't seem to me very gay. And in what story are they lodged?"

"High up; on the fourth floor."

Henri sighed. It was there he wished to be.

"Now, then, M. de Beaulieu," said Henri, "have the kindness to show me my chamber. I am desirous of reaching it, as I am very much fatigued with my day's toil."

"Here, Monseigneur," said Beaulieu, showing Henri an open door.

"No. 2!" said Henri, "and why not No. 1?"

"Because it is reserved, Monseigneur."

"Ah, ah! It appears, then, that you expect a prisoner of higher rank than mine."

"I have not said, Monseigneur, that it is a prisoner."

"And who is it, then?"

"I beg, Monseigneur, that you will not insist; for I

shall be compelled to fail, by keeping silence, in the obedience which I owe you."

"Ah, that is another thing," said Henri, and he became even more pensive. He wondered who was to occupy No. 1.

The governor, with a thousand apologies, installed Henri in his apartment, made many excuses for his deficiencies, and placing two soldiers at the door, retired.

"Now," said the governor, addressing the turnkey, "let us visit the others."

The turnkey preceded him, and traversing the hall of inquisition, they again passed through the corridor, and reached the staircase. M. de Beaulieu followed his guide up three pairs of stairs. On reaching the fourth story the turnkey opened successively three doors, each ornamented with two locks and three enormous bolts. He had scarcely touched the third door when they heard a joyous voice which exclaimed, "Eh, *mordi!* open, if it be only to give us a little air! Your stove is so warm that it stifles me here." And Coconnas, whom the reader has recognized by his favorite oath, made a bound to the door.

"One moment, my gentleman," said the turnkey; "I have not come to let you out, but to come in to you with the governor."

"Monsieur the Governor does me great honor," replied Coconnas, "and is most welcome."

M. de Beaulieu then entered, and extinguished Coconnas's cordial smile by one of those icy politenesses which belong to governors of fortresses, jailers, and executioners.

"Have you any money, Monsieur?" he inquired of his prisoner.

"I!" replied Coconnas. "Not a crown."

"Jewels?"

"I have a ring."

"Allow me to search you."

"*Mordi!*" cried Coconnas, reddening with anger.

"We must suffer everything for the service of the king!"

"Humph!" replied the Piedmontese, "they who rob on the Pont Neuf are, then, like you, in the service of the king. *Mordi!* I have been unjust, Monsieur; for until now I had taken them for thieves."

"Monsieur, good-day!" said Beaulieu. "Jailer, lock the door!"

The governor went away, taking with him the ring, — a beautiful emerald which Madame de Nevers had given to Coconnas to remind him of the color of her eyes. "Now for the other," he said, as he went out.

They crossed an empty apartment, and the game of three doors, six locks, and nine bolts, was played all over again. The last door being opened, a sigh was the first sound that saluted the visitors. The chamber was even more gloomy than the one which M. de Beaulieu had just left. La Mole was seated in a corner, his head resting on his hand, and in spite of the visit and the visitors, was as motionless as if he did not observe them.

"Good-evening, M. de la Mole," said Beaulieu.

The young man raised his head slowly.

"Good-evening, Monsieur," he replied.

"Monsieur," continued Beaulieu, "I have come to search you."

"It is useless," replied La Mole; "I will give you all I have."

"What have you?"

"About three hundred crowns, these jewels, these rings." La Mole turned out his pockets, stripped his fingers, and took the clasp out of his hat.

"Have you nothing more?"

"Not that I know of."

"And that silk cord round your neck, what may that be?" asked the governor.

"Monsieur, it is not a jewel; it is a relic."

"You must give it to me."

"What! You require —"

"I am commanded to leave you only your garments, and a relic is not a garment."

La Mole made a movement of anger, which, in contrast with the melancholy and dignified manner which distinguished him, was especially impressive to those men accustomed to boisterous emotions. But he recovered himself almost immediately. "Very well, Monsieur," he said, "you shall see the thing you have demanded;" then turning away, as if to approach the light, he unfastened the pretended relic, which was in fact a medallion containing a portrait. The latter he took out of its case, pressed it to his lips, and having kissed it many times, pretended to drop it accidentally, and placing the heel of his boot upon it, crushed it to atoms.

"Monsieur!" said the governor, and he stooped to see if he could save from the ruin the unknown object which La Mole sought to keep from him; but the portrait was literally in powder.

"The king wished to have that trinket," said La Mole, "but he had no right to the portrait which it contained. Here, then, is the medallion; take it."

"Monsieur," said Beaulieu, "I shall complain to the king." And without taking leave of his prisoner in a single word, he withdrew, so angry that he left the turnkey to fasten the doors. The jailer took a few steps as if to go out, and observing that M. de Beaulieu had already descended several stairs, he said, turning to La

Mole, "Faith, Monsieur, it was very well you gave me the hundred crowns at once, for which I am to give you leave to see and talk with your companion; for if you had not, the governor would have taken them with the other three hundred, and my conscience would then not have allowed me to do anything for you. But I have been paid in advance, and have promised you shall see your comrade, and an honest man always keeps his word. Only if you can avoid it, for your own sake as well as mine, do not talk politics."

La Mole came forth from his apartment, and found himself face to face with Coconnas, who was walking up and down the flags of the intermediate chamber. The two friends threw themselves into each other's arms. The jailer pretended to wipe the corner of his eye, and then withdrew, to see that the prisoners were not surprised by any one, — or rather, to see that he himself was not surprised.

"Ah, here you are!" said Coconnas. "Has that brute of a governor visited you?"

"Yes, and you too, I presume?"

"And taken everything from you?"

"And from you too, eh?"

"Oh, I had not much, — only a ring Henriette gave me."

"And money?"

"I had given all I possessed to that brave jailer to induce him to procure us this interview."

"Ah!" said La Mole, "it seems that he receives with both hands."

"You have also paid him?"

"I have paid him a hundred crowns."

"Better for us that our jailer should be a mercenary wretch."

"Certainly, we can make him do as we please, for money; and that, I trust, will not be lacking."

"Have you any idea what has happened?"

"Perfectly; we have been betrayed."

"By that scoundrelly Duc d'Alençon. I should have been right to twist his neck, you see."

"And do you think our position is serious?"

"I am afraid so."

"Then we may have to anticipate — the torture?"

"I will not hide from you that I have already thought so."

"And what shall you do in that case?"

"And you?"

"I shall be silent," replied La Mole, with a fevered blush, "if I can."

"And I," said Coconnas, "will tell them a few things."

"What things?" asked La Mole, eagerly.

"Oh, be easy; things that will prevent M. d'Alençon from sleeping quietly for some time."

La Mole was about to reply, when the jailer, who no doubt heard some noise, came suddenly into the chamber, and pushing each into his respective dungeon, locked them in again.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIGURE OF WAX.

For a week Charles was confined to his bed by a slow fever, interrupted by fits like epilepsy. During these attacks his cries were terrible; then, when they were over, he sank back exhausted into the arms of his nurse. Henri was shut up in his chamber at the prison, and at his own request to Charles, no one was allowed to see him, not even Marguerite. It was, in the view of all, a complete disgrace. Catherine and D'Alençon breathed more freely, thinking him lost, and Henri ate and drank more at his ease, hoping he was forgotten. At court no one suspected the real cause of the king's illness. Maître Ambroise Paré and Mazille, his colleague, believed it to be inflammation of the coats of the stomach, and had prescribed a regimen which aided the operation of the drink prescribed by René, and which Charles received thrice a day from the hands of his nurse; it was the only nourishment he took.

La Mole and Coconnas were at Vincennes in close confinement. Marguerite and Madame de Nevers had made several attempts to see them or to send them a letter, but in vain.

One morning Charles felt rather better, and ordered that the court should be admitted. The doors were accordingly opened; and it was easy to see by his pale cheeks and the feverish glare of his eyes what great rav-

ages disease had made on the young king. The royal chamber was soon filled with courtiers, curious and interested.

Catherine, D'Alençon, and Marguerite were informed that the king gave audience. They entered nearly at the same time, — Catherine calm, D'Alençon smiling, Marguerite dejected. Catherine sat down by the side of the bed without remarking the look Charles gave her; D'Alençon stood at the foot; Marguerite leaned against a table. On seeing her brother thus worn by illness, she could not repress a sigh and a tear.

Charles, whom nothing escaped, saw the tear and heard the sigh, and made a motion of his head to Marguerite, unseen by all but her. This sign, slight as it was, gave courage to the poor queen, to whom Henri had not had time or perhaps had not chosen to say anything. She feared for her husband; she trembled for her lover. For herself she had no fear; she knew La Mole too well not to feel that she might fully rely upon him.

"Well, my dear son," said Catherine, "how are you now?"

"Better, Madame, better."

"And what say the physicians?"

"Oh, my physicians, they are very clever fellows," cried Charles, bursting into a discordant laugh; "I have great amusement in listening to their discussions about my malady."

"What my brother wants," observed François, "is to take the fresh air. The chase, which he is so fond of, would do him good."

"And yet," replied Charles, with a singular smile, "the last did me a great deal of harm."

Then, with an inclination of his head, he signified to the courtiers that the audience was at an end. D'Alençon

bowed and withdrew. Marguerite seized Charles's wasted hand and kissed it tenderly, then left the apartment.

"Dear Margot!" murmured Charles.

Catherine remained; and Charles, seeing her alone with him, recoiled as if from a serpent. He knew to whom and to what his death was attributable. "Why do you stay, Madame?" asked he, with a shudder.

"I wish to speak to you of important matters, my son," returned Catherine.

"Speak, Madame," said Charles.

"Sire, you said just now that your doctors are very skilful."

"I say so still."

"But what have they done since you have been ill?"

"Nothing, that is true; but if you could have heard what they have said! In fact, Madame, one might wish to be ill only to have the opportunity of hearing so learned dissertations."

"Well, I suspect that clever as they are, they know nothing at all about your disorder."

"Really, Madame?"

"And that they treat the symptoms, instead of treating the cause."

"On my soul," replied Charles, astonished, "I think you are right!"

"Well, my son," continued Catherine, "as it is essential for my happiness and for the welfare of the kingdom that you should be cured as speedily as possible, I have assembled all the men skilled, not only in curing the diseases of the body, but those of the mind."

"What was the result?"

"That which I expected; I have the remedy that will cure not only your body, but your mind."

Charles trembled; he thought that his mother intended

to give him a fresh poison, finding the first too slow in operation.

"Where is this remedy?" asked he.

"In the disease itself."

"Where is that situated?"

"Listen, my son," said the queen. "Did you never hear of secret enemies, who from a distance assassinate their victim?"

"By steel, or by poison?" demanded Charles, without for an instant losing sight of his mother's impassive face.

"No, by other means, sure but terrible."

"Explain yourself."

"My son," asked the Florentine, "do you believe in magic?"

"Fully," returned Charles, repressing a smile of incredulity.

"Well, then," continued Catherine, "from magic proceed all your sufferings. An enemy, who dared not attack you openly, has done so in secret; a terrible conspiracy, the more terrible that it was without accomplices, has been directed against your Majesty."

"Oh, no!" said Charles, shocked by that depth of cunning.

"Examine well, my son; recall certain projects of escape which might have assured the safety of your murderer."

"Murderer!" cried Charles; "murderer, do you say? Has any one, then, tried to kill me?"

"Yes, my son. You doubt it perhaps, but I have gained certain knowledge of it."

"I never doubt what you tell me," replied the king, sarcastically. "I am curious to know how they have sought to kill me."

"By magic."

"Explain yourself, Madame?"

"If the conspirator I mean, and whom your Majesty suspects already in your mind, — after having arranged his batteries, sure of success, — had managed to slip away, perhaps no one ever would have known the cause of your Majesty's sufferings. But, happily, Sire, your brother watched over you."

"What brother?"

"D'Alençon."

"Ah, true!" said Charles, with a bitter laugh; "I forgot I had a brother. Well, continue, Madame."

"He very fortunately discovered the clew to the conspirator."

"Ah! I suppose you mean the King of Navarre, Mother?" replied Charles, wishing to see how far her dissimulation would go.

Catherine hypocritically cast down her eyes.

"I have had him arrested and sent to Vincennes for his escapade," continued the king. "Is he more culpable than I suspected, then?"

"Do you feel the fever that consumes you?" asked Catherine.

"Yes, to be sure," replied Charles, his brow darkening.

"Do you feel the fire that burns your stomach?"

"Ay, Madame," said Charles, with increasing gloom.

"Do you feel the shooting pains in your head?"

"Yes, yes, Madame. Oh, I feel all that! How well you describe my illness!"

"Well, look here." And she drew from under her mantle a little figure. The figure was of yellow wax, about ten inches high, clothed in a robe covered with golden stars, also of wax, and over this a royal mantle of the same material.

"What is this statue?" asked Charles.

"See what it has on the head," said Catherine.

"A crown," replied Charles.

"And in the heart —"

"A needle."

"Well —"

"Well, do you recognize yourself?"

"Myself!"

"Yes, yourself, in your royal robes, with the crown on your head."

"And who made this figure," asked the king, weary of the miserable farce, — "the King of Navarre, of course?"

"No, Sire."

"No? then I do not understand you."

"I say no," replied Catherine, "because you perhaps ask the question literally; had you put it in a different manner, I should have answered yes."

Charles made no answer. He tried to read the thoughts of that dark soul which ever closed itself before him at the moment he thought he was about to read.

"Sire," she continued, "this statue was found by the *procureur-général*, Laguesle, in the apartment of the man who led a horse for the King of Navarre on the day of the hawking party."

"M. de la Mole?"

"Himself. Now look at the needle in the heart, and the name written on the label attached to it."

"I see an *M*," returned Charles.

"That means '*Mort*' [Death]; it is the magic formula."

"So, then, the person who seeks to kill me is M. de la Mole?" said Charles.

"Yes, he is the poniard; but behind the poniard is the hand that directs it."

"This, then, is the cause of my illness? The day the charm is destroyed my illness will cease? But what is to be done about it? for you know that, unlike you, I know nothing of charms and spells."

"The death of the conspirator destroys the charm. Its power ceases with his life."

"Really!" said Charles, with an air of astonishment.

"Did you not know that?"

"I am no sorcerer."

"But now you are convinced, are you not, of the cause of your illness?"

"Completely."

"You do not say so out of complaisance?"

"Oh, no! from the bottom of my heart."

"Heaven be praised!" said Catherine, as if she believed in God.

"Yes, Heaven be praised!" repeated Charles, ironically. "I know now the cause of my illness, and whom to punish."

"And we will punish —"

"M. de la Mole; you say he is the guilty party?"

"I say he is the instrument."

"Well, we will begin with him; and if he has an accomplice, he will confess."

"If he does not," muttered Catherine, "I have infallible means of making him. You will then, Sire, permit the process to begin?"

"I desire it, Madame, and the sooner the better."

Catherine pressed her son's hand, without understanding its nervous trembling as he pressed her own, and left the apartment without hearing his sardonic laugh, or the terrible imprecation which followed that laugh. The king asked himself whether it was prudent to allow that woman her freedom, since in a few hours she could do

evil beyond remedy. At this moment he heard a rustling noise, and turning round, saw Marguerite lifting the tapestry of the door opening into the nurse's apartments.

"Oh, Sire, Sire!" cried Marguerite, "you know what she says is false."

"She? Who?" said Charles.

"Oh, Charles! it is terrible to accuse one's mother. I suspected that she was staying only to persecute them; but upon my life, upon your own, upon both our souls, I tell you that she lies!"

"Persecute them! whom does she persecute?"

Both of them instinctively spoke in a low tone; it would seem that they were afraid to hear each other.

"Henri, in the first place, your Henriot, who loves you, and is devoted to you."

"You think so, Margot?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, and so am I."

"Why, then, did you arrest him, and send him to Vincennes?" said Marguerite.

"Because he himself requested it."

"He requested it, Sire!"

"Oh, he has singular ideas, — perhaps he is wrong, perhaps he is right; but he thought he should be more safe in disgrace than in favor, away from me than near me, at Vincennes than in the Louvre."

"Ah! I understand. He is safe, then?"

"As safe as a man can be for whose life Beaulieu answers with his own."

"Oh, thanks! but —"

"But what?"

"There is another person in whose welfare I am interested."

"Who is this person?"

"Sire, spare me; I scarce dare name him to my brother, much less to my king."

"M. de la Mole, is it not?"

"Alas, Sire, you wished once before to kill him; and he escaped only by a miracle."

"He had committed but one crime then, now he has committed two."

"Ah! he is not guilty of the second."

"But did you not hear what our good mother said, poor Margot?"

"I have already told you that what she said is false."

"Perhaps you do not know that a figure of wax has been seized at La Mole's?"

"Yes, my brother, I know it."

"That this figure is pierced to the heart by a needle, and that the needle carries a small banner inscribed with an *M?*"

"I know that also."

"That this figure has a royal robe on its shoulders, and a royal crown on its head?"

"I know all that."

"Well, then, what have you to say?"

"I have to say that this small image, which bears a royal robe on its shoulders, and a royal crown on its head, is the representation of a woman and not of a man."

"Bah!" said Charles; "and that needle piercing the heart?"

"It was a charm to win that woman's love, and not a spell to doom a man to death."

"But that letter *M?*"

"It does not mean '*Mort*,' as the queen-mother says."

"What, then, does it mean?" asked Charles.

"It means — it means the name of the woman loved by M. de la Mole."

"And that woman's name is —"

"MARGUERITE!" cried the queen, falling on her knees at Charles's bedside, and bathing his hand with tears.

"Silence, Margot!" said Charles, "you may in your turn be overheard."

"Oh, no matter!" cried the queen. "If all the world were present to hear me, I would declare it infamous to abuse the love of a gentleman by staining his reputation with a charge of murder."

"Margot, what if I should tell you that I know as well as you do who is guilty and who is not?"

"My brother!"

"What if I should tell you that La Mole is innocent?"

"You know it?"

"What if I should tell you that I know the real culprit?"

"The real culprit!" cried Marguerite. "A crime has been committed, then?"

"Yes; intentionally or unintentionally, a crime has been committed."

"Upon you?"

"Upon me."

"Impossible!"

"Impossible? Look at me, Margot."

Marguerite obeyed, and shuddered as she saw him so pale.

"Margot, I have not three months to live!"

"You, my brother, my Charles?"

"Margot, I am poisoned!"

Marguerite screamed.

"Silence!" said Charles; "it must be thought that I die by magic."

"You know who is guilty."

"Yes."

"You have said that it was not La Mole?"

"No, it is not he."

"And certainly it cannot be Henri — Great God! can it be —"

"Who?"

"My brother — D'Alençon?" murmured Marguerite.

"Perhaps."

"Or," Marguerite whispered, as if alarmed at what she was going to say, "our mother?"

Charles remained silent. Marguerite, however, read the answer in his eye, and sank into a chair.

"My God!" murmured she. "It is impossible!"

"Impossible?" said Charles, with a forced laugh. "It is a pity René is not here; he could tell you my story."

"René?"

"Yes; he would tell you, for example, that a woman to whom he dared refuse nothing, came to him to ask for a book on hunting from his library; that a subtle poison has been poured upon every page of that book; that the poison, destined for some one, I know not for whom, fell — by caprice of chance, or by chastisement of Heaven — into other hands than those for which it was intended. But since René is not here, if you wish to see the book, it is there in my cabinet; and you will see, in the handwriting of the Florentine, that that book, which still contains in its leaves the death of twenty persons, was given by him to his compatriot."

"Silence, Charles; in your turn, silence!" said Marguerite.

"You now see clearly that it must be believed that I die by magic."

"But it is monstrous!" exclaimed Marguerite. "Pardon! pardon! You know he is innocent!"

"Yes, I know it; but the world must believe him

guilty. Permit, then, the death of your lover; it is a small price to pay to save the honor of the house of France. I myself die that the secret may be preserved."

Marguerite saw that her only hope lay in her own resources, and withdrew, weeping.

Meantime Catherine had lost not an instant, but had written to Laguesle the following historical letter, which we give word for word, and which throws considerable light on this bloody drama: —

Monsieur le Procureur, — I have this evening been informed for certain that La Mole has committed sacrilege; many evil books and papers have been found in his apartments in Paris. See, therefore, the chief president, and inform him as soon as possible of the whole affair, — of the waxen figure meant for the king, and which they have pierced to the heart.

Catherine.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE INVISIBLE BUCKLERS.

The day after that on which Catherine had written this letter, the governor entered Coconnas's cell with an imposing *cortége* of two halberdiers and four black-gowned men. Coconnas was invited to descend into the room where Laguesle and two judges waited to interrogate him according to Catherine's instructions.

During the week he had passed in prison Coconnas had reflected deeply; besides that, he and La Mole, seeing each other daily, had agreed on the conduct they were to pursue, which was to persist in an absolute denial; and they were persuaded that with a little address the affair would take a more favorable turn. The charges could not weigh more heavily against them than against the others. Henri and Marguerite had made no attempt at flight; and he and La Mole could not be compromised in an affair the principals in which were at liberty (Coconnas was ignorant that Henri was in the same prison with themselves). Furthermore, the complaisance of his jailer apprised him that over his head there was extended a protection, which he called "invisible bucklers."

Up to this time the interrogations had been confined to the designs of the King of Navarre, his projects of flight, and the part the two friends had borne in these projects. Coconnas had constantly replied in a way more than vague, and much more than adroit; he was ready still to reply in a similar manner, and had prepared beforehand

all his little repartees, when he suddenly found that the subject of interrogation was changed. The questions were now directed to several visits made to René, and one or more waxen figures made at La Mole's instigation. Prepared as he was, Coconnas believed that the accusation had lost much of its intensity, since it was no longer in reference to having betrayed a king, but to having made a figure of a queen, and this queen not more than from eight to ten inches high at most. He therefore replied with much vivacity that neither he nor his friend had played with a doll for many years; and he saw with much satisfaction that his replies more than once made the judges smile. His interrogatory concluded, he went up to his chamber singing so merrily that La Mole, for whom he made all this noise, drew from it the brightest auguries.

La Mole was brought down from his tower, as Coconnas had been, and saw with equal astonishment the new turn which the investigation took. He was questioned as to his visits to René. He replied that he had only once visited the Florentine. Then they asked him if he had not ordered a waxen figure. He replied that René had showed him such a figure ready-made. Then he was asked if this figure did not represent a man. He replied that it represented a woman. Then they inquired if the purpose of the charm was not to cause the death of this man. He replied that the purpose of the charm was to cause himself to be beloved by the woman.

These questions, put in a hundred different ways, were always replied to by La Mole in the same manner. The judges looked at one another with a kind of indecision, not knowing very well what to say or do, when a note brought to the *procureur-général* solved the difficulty. It was in these words: —

If the accused denies, put him to the torture. C.

The *procureur* put the note in his pocket, smiled at La Mole, and politely dismissed him. La Mole returned to his dungeon almost as assured, if not as joyous, as Coconnas. "I think all will now go well," he said.

An hour afterwards he heard footsteps, and saw a note which was slipped under his door, without seeing the hand that moved it. He took it up with a trembling hand, and almost died with joy as he recognized the writing.

"Courage!" said the billet. "I am watching over you."

"Ah! if she is watching," cried La Mole, kissing the note which a hand so dear had touched, — "if she is watching, I am saved!"

In order that the reader may understand La Mole's confidence in that note, and the trust reposed by him and by Coconnas in what the Piedmontese called their "invisible bucklers," we must conduct him to that small house and to that chamber where so many scenes of intoxicating enjoyment, so many perfumes hardly evaporated, so many sweet remembrances now changed to griefs, weighed upon the heart of a woman lying back on a divan covered with velvet cushions.

"To be a queen — powerful, young, rich, beautiful — and suffer what I suffer!" she exclaimed; "oh, it is impossible!"

Then in her agitation, she rose, paced up and down, suddenly paused, pressed her burning forehead against the ice-cold marble, rose, pale and her face covered with tears, wrung her hands in agony, and fell back, fainting, into the nearest chair.

Suddenly the tapestry which separated the apartment in the Rue Cloche Percée from the apartment in the Rue Tizon was lifted up, and the Duchesse de Nevers appeared.

"Ah!" exclaimed Marguerite, "is it you? With what impatience I have awaited you. Well, what news?"

"Bad news — bad news, my dear friend! Catherine herself is hurrying on the trial, and is at this moment at Vincennes."

"And René?"

"Is arrested."

"And our prisoners?"

"The jailer informs me that they see each other daily. The day before yesterday they were searched; and La Mole broke your miniature to atoms rather than let them have it."

"Dear La Mole!"

"Annibal laughed in the teeth of the inquisitors."

"Worthy Annibal! And what more?"

"They were this morning interrogated as to the flight of the king, his projects of rebellion in Navarre; and they have told nothing."

"Oh, I knew they would keep silence; but silence will kill them just as much as if they spoke."

"Yes, but we must save them."

"You have thought over our plan, then?"

"I have occupied myself with it since yesterday."

"Well?"

"I have come to terms with Beaulieu. Ah, my dear queen, what a hard and greedy man! It will cost a man's life and three hundred thousand crowns."

"Only the life of a man and three hundred thousand crowns? Why, it is nothing!"

"Nothing! three hundred thousand crowns! Why, all your jewels and all mine will not be enough."

"Oh, that's nothing! The King of Navarre will pay something, the Duc d'Alençon pay something, my brother Charles must pay something, or if not —"

"Oh, you reason like a fool. I have them, — the three hundred thousand crowns."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"And how have you procured them?"

"Ah, that's telling!"

"Is it a secret?"

"For all the world except you."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" said Marguerite, smiling through her tears, "have you stolen them?"

"You shall judge."

"Well?"

"You remember that horrible Nantouillet?"

"The rich fellow, the usurer?"

"If you call him so."

"Well?"

"Well, one day seeing a certain woman pass, of blond complexion, green eyes, her hair dressed with three rubies, one on her brow, and the two others on her temples, — a *coiffure* very becoming to her, — that rich fellow, that usurer, not knowing that she was a duchess, called out, 'For three kisses I will replace those three rubies with three diamonds worth one hundred thousand crowns each.'"

"Well, Henriette?"

"Well, my dear, the diamonds are sold and delivered."

"Oh, Henriette, Henriette!" murmured Marguerite.

"Hold!" cried the duchess, with an accent of shamelessness at once naïve and sublime, revealing both the woman and the age, "hold! I love Annibal!"

"It is true," said Marguerite, smiling and blushing at the same time, "you love him much; you even love him too much;" and nevertheless she pressed her hand.

"Now then," continued Henriette, "thanks to our three

diamonds, the three hundred thousand crowns and the man are ready."

"The man! what man?"

"The man who must be killed, to be sure. Have you already forgotten that there is a man to be killed?"

"And you have found the man you need?"

"Precisely so."

"At the same price?" asked Marguerite, with a smile.

"At that price I could have found a thousand," replied Henriette; "no, no, for five hundred crowns."

"You have found a man who is willing to be killed for five hundred crowns?"

"Certainly; one must live somehow."

"My dear friend, I no longer understand you. Come, speak plainly; riddles take too much time in our present situation."

"Well, listen. The jailer who has La Mole and Coconnas in keeping is an old soldier, who knows what a wound amounts to. He would willingly help in saving our friends, but does n't want to lose his place. A poniard-blow skilfully placed will do the business. We shall give him a reward, the State an indemnity. In that way the worthy fellow will receive with both hands; he will renew the fable of the pelican."

"But," said Marguerite, "a wound with a poniard —"

"Be easy; it is Annibal who will give it."

"True," said Marguerite, smiling; "he gave La Mole three wounds with sword and poniard, and La Mole is not dead. There is, then, room for hope."

"Wretch! you deserve that I should drop the whole affair."

"Oh, no, no; tell the rest, I beg of you. How are we to save them?"

"Well, this is the plot. The chapel is the only place

in the fortress where women not being prisoners are admitted. We shall hide behind the altar; under the cloth will be laid two daggers. The door of the sacristy will be previously opened. Coconnas will strike the jailer, who will fall down as if dead; we shall then appear, and each cast a cloak over the shoulders of our friend. We shall then fly with them by the small door of the sacristy, and as we shall have the pass-word, we shall get out without difficulty."

"And once out?"

"Two horses will be in waiting at the door; they will jump on them, leave France, and reach Lorraine, whence they will occasionally return incognito."

"Oh, you restore me to life!" said Marguerite. "Thus, then, we shall save them?"

"I almost would warrant it."

"And soon?"

"In three or four days; Beaulieu is to let us know."

"But if you were recognized in the vicinity of Vincennes, all our plans might be marred."

"How could any one recognize me? I go as a nun, with a large hood over my face; so that no one sees even the end of my nose."

"We cannot take too many precautions."

"I know that well enough, '*mordi!*' as poor Annibal would say."

"Have you any news of the King of Navarre?"

"Yes, he was never happier, it appears. He laughs, sings, and eats, drinks, and sleeps well; all he asks is to be well guarded."

"He is right. And my mother?"

"I have told you that she pushes on the trial as fast as possible."

"Yes, but does she suspect anything in regard to us?"

"How do you think she could suspect anything? All who are in the secret are interested to keep it. Ah! I have learned that she notified the judges of Paris to hold themselves in readiness."

"Let us act quickly, Henriette. If our poor captives should change their prison all must be begun again."

"Be easy; I am as eager as you are to see them at liberty."

"Oh, yes, I know it; and thanks, thanks a hundred times for what you have done!"

"Adieu, Marguerite! I am going to take the field again."

"Are you sure of Beaulieu?"

"I think so."

"Of the jailer?"

"He has promised."

"Of the horses?"

"They will be the best in the Duc de Nevers's stables."

"Henriette, I adore you!" And Marguerite threw her arms around her friend's neck; after which the two women separated, promising to see each other again next day and every day, at the same place and hour. These were the two charming and devoted creatures whom Coconnas, with so much reason, called the "invisible bucklers."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TRIAL.

"Well, my brave friend," said Coconnas to La Mole, when they met after the examination in which for the first time the wax figure had been introduced, "everything seems going on as favorably as we could wish, and we shall ere long be at liberty."

"No doubt," answered La Mole; "and then the complaisance with which our jailers treat us abundantly proves that our noble friends are at work for us."

"To be sure they are," rejoined Coconnas; "and how could a queen or a princess better employ her riches than in procuring our freedom? Now let us go over our lesson a little. We are to be conducted to the chapel, where we shall be left in charge of our turnkey; we each find a dagger in the place indicated. I make a hole in the body of our guide —"

"Oh, not in the body! — you would rob him of his five hundred crowns; in the arm."

"Ah, yes, in the arm! That would ruin him, poor man! it would be clear enough that he was in collusion with us. No, no, — in the right side, slipping skilfully along the ribs; it is a veritable wound, and harmless."

"Well, so much for that; then —"

"Then we barricade the door of the chapel by piling up the benches against it, while our two princesses emerge from their hiding-places behind the altar, and Henriette opens the small side door!"

"And then," said La Mole, with that quivering voice which sounds like music from the lips, — "and then we gain the forest. A good kiss to each makes us joyous and strong. Do you see us, Annibal, leaning forward on our fast horses, and bearing light burdens of anxiety? Oh, what a pleasant thing is fear! — fear in the open air, when one has at his side a good sword unsheathed, when one cries, 'Hurrah!' to his horse driven by the spur, who at each cry bounds and flies!"

"Yes," said Coconnas; "but fear between four walls, — what do you say to that, La Mole? I can speak of it, for I have experienced something like that. When Beaulieu put his sallow face into my chamber for the first time, in the shade behind him I saw the gleaming of partisans, and there was the sinister sound of steel striking against steel. I swear to you, I thought at once of the Duc d'Alençon, and expected to see his villanous face between the villanous heads of two halberdiers. I was mistaken, and that was my only consolation."

"So," said La Mole, who followed his own glowing thoughts instead of attending his friend in his excursions through the field of fancy, — "so they have provided everything, even the place of our retreat. We are going to Lorraine, dear friend. In fact, I should have preferred Navarre; in Navarre I should be near her. But Navarre is too remote; Nancey is better. Besides, there we shall be only eighty leagues from Paris. Do you know, Annibal, in leaving here I bear with me one regret."

"Ah, faith! no, indeed! As for me, I confess that I leave all mine here."

"Well, it is that we are not able to take our worthy jailer with us, instead of —"

"But he would n't be willing," said Coconnas; "it would cost him too much. Think of it; five hundred

crowns from us, a recompense from the Government, promotion perhaps. How happily that fellow will live when I shall have killed him! But what is the matter?"

"Nothing, — an idea that occurred to me."

"Not a comical idea, apparently, for you have turned frightfully pale."

"I was wondering why we are taken to the chapel."

"Why," said Coconnas, "to receive the sacraments; and in good time, it seems to me."

"But," answered La Mole, "they take to the chapel only those who are condemned to death or to torture."

"Truly," replied Coconnas, becoming pale in his turn, "this deserves our attention; let us speak to the worthy fellow I am to carve my name upon with my dagger. Here, I say, turnkey!"

"Did you call?" said the man, who had been keeping watch at the top of the stairs.

"Come here."

"Here I am."

"It is settled that we are to make our escape from the chapel, is it not?"

"Hush!" said the turnkey, looking round him with terror.

"Don't be frightened, — no one can hear you; speak out."

"Yes, Monsieur, from the chapel."

"They will take us to the chapel, then?"

"Certainly, it is the custom."

"It is the custom?"

"Yes; after a condemnation to death, it is the custom to allow the condemned to spend the night in the chapel."

Coconnas and La Mole exchanged looks of surprise and alarm.

"You think, then, that we shall be condemned to death?"

"Why, you think so yourselves, don't you, — else why take the trouble to make arrangements for your flight?"

"There is reason in what he says," said Coconnas.

"We are playing a critical game, it seems," replied La Mole.

"And do I risk nothing?" said the jailer. "Suppose, in the excitement of the moment, Monsieur were to wound me in the wrong place."

"*Mordi!*" exclaimed Coconnas, "I only wish we could change places, and I had nothing more to fear than you have."

"Condemned to death!" said La Mole; "but that is impossible!"

"Impossible!" said the jailer, naïvely; "and why?"

"Hush!" said Coconnas; "I believe the door is opening down there."

"Oh, pray, pray, gentlemen, get into your cells! make haste!"

"And when will our trial take place?"

"To-morrow at latest; but don't be uneasy, — the friends who are interested for you shall be duly informed."

"Then let us bid adieu to each other, and to these walls."

The friends exchanged an affectionate embrace, and each retired to his place of confinement, — La Mole sighing, Coconnas humming an air. Nothing unusual occurred until seven o'clock in the evening. Night descended, dark and rainy, on the donjon of Vincennes, — just such weather as would have favored an escape. Coconnas's supper was brought, and eaten with his ordinary appetite; and he had well-nigh composed himself to sleep, while

listening to the loud murmurs of the wind and the splashing rain as it drove heavily against the walls, when he was roused by a sound of persons passing to and fro from the chamber of La Mole.

In vain did Coconnas strain his listening powers; he could distinguish nothing. The time passed on; no one came near him. "Strange," murmured he, "that La Mole should receive so many visits, while I seem quite forgotten! perhaps La Mole felt himself suddenly taken ill, and called out for assistance. What can it mean?"

Three hours slowly passed away, and Coconnas, notwithstanding his anxieties, was beginning again to sleep, when a turning of the lock startled him.

"Oh, oh!" he said, "it is already time for us to set out, and they are coming, no doubt, to conduct us to the chapel without any previous condemnation. *Mordi!* the night is most favorable, — dark as a pit; I only hope the horses they give us will be able to find their way." He was about to ask some jocular question of the turnkey, who had by that time entered, when he saw the man put his finger to his lips, and roll his eyes in a significant manner.

Coconnas then perceived a dim outline of persons following the jailer, and quickly distinguished two figures wearing helmets, on which the smoking candle cast a yellow light. "Oh!" said he, in a low tone, "what is the meaning of all this? Where are we going, then?"

The jailer replied only with a sigh, which resembled a groan.

"Follow the halberdiers, Monsieur," said a voice, which at once made Coconnas aware that the soldiers were accompanied by an officer of some kind.

"And where is M. de la Mole?" inquired the Piedmontese. "What has become of him?"

"Follow the halberdiers!" repeated the same voice that had previously spoken.

There was nothing for him but to obey; without another word, therefore, Coconnas began to descend the spiral staircase. At the first floor the guards stopped; the door was opened, and a number of persons arrayed as judges and seated in judicial order presented themselves, while in the background Coconnas discerned the dim outline of a man with naked arms and a look that made a cold dew start to his forehead.

Still, concealing his alarm, he entered the chamber with an easy air, his head thrown a little on one side, and his hand on his hip, after the most approved manner of court gallants. As Coconnas advanced, he perceived La Mole sitting on a bench near the judges and officials. The guards led Coconnas to the front of the tribunal; arrived there, he stopped, turned round, and smilingly nodded to La Mole, then remained in a waiting attitude.

"What is your name?" inquired the president.

"Marc-Annibal de Coconnas," replied the Piedmontese, with gentlemanly grace, "Comte de Montpantier, Chenaux, and other places; but our titles are known, I presume."

"Where were you born?"

"At St. Colomban, near Suza."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven years and three months."

"Good!" answered the president.

"He seems to be pleased with my account of myself," murmured Coconnas.

"Now, then," continued the president, "what was your motive in leaving the service of the Duc d'Alençon?"

"To rejoin my friend, M. de la Mole, who, when I left M. d'Alençon, had also left him some days previously."

"And what were you doing when arrested, the day of the chase?"

"Why, hunting, of course!" replied Coconnas.

"The king was also present at that chase, and there he was first attacked with the malady from which he now suffers."

"I know nothing about that; I was not near the king myself, and I did not even know he had been taken ill."

The judges looked at one another with an air of incredulity.

"Oh! you were ignorant of his Majesty's illness, were you?"

"Yes, completely so, and I regret to hear of it; for though the King of France is not my king, I have a great deal of sympathy for him."

"Really?"

"On my honor. I don't say as much for his brother, the Duc d'Alençon, for there, I must confess —"

"We have nothing to do with the Duc d'Alençon, Monsieur; our business relates to his Majesty —"

"Whose very humble servant I have already told you I am," answered Coconnas.

"Then, being his servant, as you say, be pleased to tell us what you know relative to a certain wax figure."

"Oh! what, we are going over that story again, are we?"

"If you have no objection."

"*Pardieu!* on the contrary, I prefer it; go on."

"How came this statue to be found in M. de la Mole's possession?"

"M. de la Mole's! No, no, you mean in René's possession."

"Then you acknowledge the existence of such an image?"

"I don't know whether it exists or not; I could tell you better if I saw it."

"Here it is. Is it the one you have previously seen?"

"It is."

"Write down," said the judge, "that the accused recognizes the statue as the one he has heretofore seen in the possession of M. de la Mole."

"No, no, no!" interposed Coconnas, "do not let us mistake one another; write that I say it is the same figure I saw at René's."

"Well, be it so, — at René's; and on what day?"

"The only day La Mole and myself ever were at René's."

"You admit, then, having been there with M. de la Mole?"

"Why, I never denied it, did I?"

"Write down that the accused admits having gone to René's to work certain conjurations —"

"Holloa, ho! gently, gently, Monsieur President! Moderate your enthusiasm, I beg; I have not said one word of all that."

"You deny having gone to René's house to work conjurations?"

"I do; the conjuration that took place was by chance, and wholly unpremeditated."

"But still it took place?"

"Certainly; I cannot deny that something resembling the working of a charm did occur."

"Write down that the accused admits having gone to René's for the sake of obtaining a charm against the king's life."

"What! against the king's life!" exclaimed Coconnas. "It is an infamous lie; no such charm was ever made or sought for."

"There, gentlemen!" said La Mole, "you hear!"

"Silence!" vociferated the president; then, turning towards the clerk, he said, "Against the king's life. Have you written it?"

"No, no!" cried Coconnas; "I said no such thing, and then the figure is not that of a man, but of a woman."

"What did I tell you, gentlemen?" inquired La Mole.

"M. de la Mole," said the president, "reply when you are questioned, but do not interrupt the interrogation of others."

"You say that the figure is that of a woman?" resumed the judge.

"Certainly I say it."

"Why, then, does it wear a royal crown and mantle?"

"*Pardieu!* for a very simple reason, — because the figure was meant for — "

Here La Mole rose, and placed a finger on his lips.

"True!" said Coconnas; "I was beginning to relate matters with which these gentlemen have nothing at all to do."

"You persist, then, in your assertion that this waxen image was intended to represent a woman?"

"Yes, certainly, I persist."

"And you refuse to say who the woman was?"

"A woman in my own country," said La Mole, "whom I loved, and by whom I was desirous of being beloved."

"You are not the person interrogated, M. de la Mole," exclaimed the president; "either be silent, or I shall be obliged to have you gagged."

"Gag!" said Coconnas. "What are you saying there, Monsieur in the black robe? You will gag my friend! — a gentleman! Come, now!"

"Bring in René!" said the *procureur-général.*

"Yes, yes, by all means, bring René," said Coconnas,

"bring him in; we shall soon see who is right, — you three, or we two."

René entered, pale, shrunken, and so altered that the two young men could hardly recognize him. The wretched old man appeared more conscience-stricken and bowed down by the weight of the crime he was about to commit than by those he had already perpetrated.

"Maître René!" said the judge, "do you know the two accused persons here present?"

"I do," answered René, in a voice which betrayed his emotion.

"As having seen them where?"

"In various places, but more especially at my own house."

"How frequently at your house?"

"Only once."

As René proceeded, the countenance of Coconnas grew brighter; La Mole, on the contrary, as though warned by some presentiment of evil, looked graver than before.

"And on what occasion did they pay you a visit?"

René seemed to hesitate a moment, then said, "To order me to make a small waxen figure."

"Maître René," interrupted Coconnas, "permit me to tell you that you are making a little mistake."

"Silence, I command!" cried the president; then, turning towards René, he said, "And pray was this figure to represent, a man or a woman?"

"A man," answered René.

Coconnas sprang up as though he had received an electric shock. "A man!" he said.

"A man," responded René, but in so feeble a voice that the president could scarcely hear him.

"And why was this statue clad in a royal mantle, with a crown on its head?"

"Because," replied René, "it represented a king."

"Infamous liar!" cried Coconnas, infuriated.

"Hold your peace, Coconnas!" interposed La Mole. "Let the man talk; every one has a right to destroy his soul."

"But not the bodies of others, *mordi!*"

"And what is the signification of the needle found sticking in the heart of the image, with a small banner bearing the letter *M* at the end?"

"The needle is emblematical of the sword or dagger, and the letter *M* stands for *Mort*."

Coconnas sprang forward as though to strangle René, but was held back by the guards.

"That will do!" said the officer; "the tribunal is in possession of all it desires to know. Let the prisoners be reconducted to the waiting-room."

"But," exclaimed Coconnas, "it is quite impossible to hear one's self accused of such crimes without protesting against them."

"Protest, Monsieur; no one hinders you. Guards, take the prisoners."

The officials seized upon La Mole and Coconnas, and led them away, each by a separate door. The *procureur-général* then signed to the man with bare arms, whom Coconnas had observed on entering, and said, "Do not go away, my good fellow, there will be work for you before the night is over."

"Which shall I begin with?" said the man, respectfully raising his cap.

"With that one!" answered the president, pointing to La Mole, whom they could still perceive, like a shadow between his two guards; then, approaching René, who stood in trembling expectation of being ordered back to his place of confinement in the Châtelet, "You have

well spoken, my friend," he said to him; "be under no alarm. Both the king and the queen shall be made acquainted that it is to you they are indebted for coming at the real truth of this affair."

But this promise, instead of restoring René to strength, seemed to terrify him; and he replied only by a deep sigh.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TORTURE OF THE BOOT.

It was only when he had been conducted to his new cell, and the door was closed upon him, that Coconnas, left to himself, and no longer sustained by his contention with the judges and his wrath against René, fell into a train of sad reflections. "It seems to me," he said, "that the affair is taking a bad turn, and that it is time to go for a little while to the chapel. I distrust condemnations to death; for unquestionably they are condemning us to death at this moment. I distrust especially condemnations to death pronounced secretly in a fortified castle before faces as ugly as are all those that surround me. They seriously intend to cut off our heads, — hum! hum! I return to what I said; it is time to go to the chapel."

These words, uttered in a low tone, were followed by silence; and that silence was broken by a dull, stifled, wailing cry which was not like that of a human being. It seemed to pierce the thick wall and to vibrate on the iron bars.

Coconnas shuddered with terror, although he was so brave that his courage was nearly allied to that of wild beasts. He stood motionless, doubting whether what he had heard was not the wind, when he heard it again; and this time he was convinced not only that the voice was human, but that it was the voice of La Mole. At this voice, the Piedmontese forgot he was himself a prisoner confined by two doors, three gates, and a wall twelve

feet thick; he rushed forward, crying, "They are murdering some one here!"

But he encountered the wall so violently that the shock threw him back on a stone bench.

"Oh, they have killed him!" he repeated; "it is abominable! and to be without arms!"

He reached out his hands on every side. "Ah, that iron ring! he said; "I will pull it from the wall, and then woe to him who comes near me!" He rose, seized the iron ring, and with his first effort shook it so violently that it was evident that by two such efforts he would secure it. But suddenly the door opened, and the light of two torches invaded his cell.

The same voice that before had been so disagreeable to him said, "Come, Monsieur, the court awaits you."

"Good!" said Coconnas; "to hear my sentence, I suppose."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I breathe again; go on, Monsieur." And he followed the officer, who went in front, his black wand in his hand.

Spite of his expressed satisfaction, Coconnas glanced anxiously on either side. "Oh," murmured he, "I do not see my worthy jailer; I wish he were here."

On entering the chamber, Coconnas perceived the *procureur-général*, who had conducted the prosecution with most palpable animosity, for Catherine had charged him to carry on the affair earnestly. A curtain was drawn back and exposed the recesses of this chamber; so terrible were these recesses, thus lighted up, that Coconnas felt his knees tremble, and he exclaimed, "Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

The sight before him was indeed alarming. The portion of the apartment which had been concealed during the examination by a curtain, now raised, seemed like the vestibule of hell. "Oh!" said Coconnas, "the chamber

of torture is prepared, and only awaits the victim. What does this mean?"

"Kneel down, Marc-Annibal de Coconnas," said a voice; "kneel down, and hear your sentence."

Against a summons of that kind the whole person of Coconnas instinctively rebelled. But before he had time to collect his thoughts, two strong hands laid hold of him, and forced him to his knees.

The voice continued: "Sentence of the court sitting at Vincennes on Marc-Annibal de Coconnas, accused and convicted of the crime of high treason; of an attempt to poison; of sacrilege and magic against the person of the king; of a conspiracy against the State; and of having driven a prince of the blood into rebellion by his pernicious counsels."

At each of these charges Coconnas shook his head.

The judge continued: "In consequence of which, the aforesaid Marc-Annibal de Coconnas will be taken from prison to the Place St. Jean en Grève, to be there decapitated; his property will be confiscated, his woods cut down, his château destroyed, and a post planted, with a copper-plate bearing an inscription recording his crime and punishment."

"As for my head," said Coconnas, "that I know is in jeopardy; but as for my woods and châteaux, I do not fear for them in the least, and I defy all your hatchets and pickaxes to harm them."

"Silence!" said the judge, and he continued: "And, moreover, the aforesaid Coconnas —"

"What!" interrupted Coconnas, "will they do anything more after cutting my head off? Oh, that seems to me rather severe!"

"No, Monsieur," replied the judge, "*before*."

He continued: "And the aforesaid Coconnas will un-

dergo, before the execution of this sentence, the extraordinary torture, consisting of ten wedges — "

Coconnas started, and looked with flashing eyes at the judge. "For what?" cried he, finding only those simple words to express the flood of thoughts that rose upon his mind.

The torture was, in reality, ruin to Coconnas's hopes. He would not be taken to the chapel until after the torture, and the torture often occasioned death. It was especially likely to be fatal where the sufferer was brave and firm; for to him it would seem cowardly to yield a confession, and so long as he did not confess the torture would be not only continued, but increased.

The judge made no reply, but continued: "In order to compel him to name his accomplices and to confess his plots and machinations in detail."

"*Mordi!*" cried Coconnas, "this is infamous! this is cowardice!"

The judge, accustomed to the indignant protestations of the victims, made a sign. Coconnas, seized by the legs and arms, was overpowered and bound to the rack before he could even see who were the authors of this violence.

"Wretches!" shouted Coconnas, shaking in a paroxysm of fury the rack and the trestles in such a manner that his tormentors recoiled in alarm. "Scoundrels! torture me, shatter me, tear me in pieces, — you will learn nothing, I swear to you! Ah! you think that with bits of wood and with bits of iron you will compel a gentleman of my name to speak. Come on, I defy you!"

"Clerk, prepare to write," said the judge.

"Yes, prepare to write," cried Coconnas; "and if you write all I tell you, you scoundrel, you will have something to do!"

"Will you confess?" asked the judge.

"No, not one word; go to the devil!"

"You may change your mind, Monsieur, during the preparations. Come, Maître, fit the boot to Monsieur."

At these words, a man holding a cord in his hand advanced towards him. It was Maître Caboche. A painful astonishment appeared on Coconnas's face; but instead of crying out, he remained motionless and silent, unable to withdraw his eyes from that forgotten friend who reappeared at such a moment. Caboche, without moving a muscle of his face, or appearing to recognize Coconnas, placed two planks between his legs, then two more outside, and bound them together with a cord. This formed what was called the "boot." In the "ordinary" torture, six wedges were used, which crushed the flesh; in the "extraordinary" torture ten were employed, which not only crushed the flesh, but broke the bones also.

Maître Caboche introduced the wedge between the planks, and then, with his mallet in his hand, looked at the judge.

"Will you confess?" asked the latter.

"Never!" returned Coconnas, although he felt a cold damp all over his brow.

"Proceed," said the judge.

Caboche raised his heavy mallet, and struck a tremendous blow on the wedge. Coconnas did not utter the slightest sound at this first wedge, which usually extorted a groan from the most resolute. On the contrary, his countenance expressed the greatest wonder, and he gazed in astonishment at Caboche, who, his arm raised, stood ready to repeat the blow.

"What was your intention in concealing yourself in the forest?" demanded the judge.

"To enjoy the fresh air"

"Proceed," said the judge.

Caboche struck again. Coconnas did not stir, but kept his eyes fixed on the executioner with the same expression of surprise. The judge frowned.

"He is indeed determined!" muttered he. "Has the wedge entered, Maître?"

Caboche stooped as if to examine it, and whispered to Coconnas, "Cry out! cry out!" Then rising, "Up to the head, Monsieur," said he to the judge.

"Second wedge!" said the judge, quietly.

The words of Caboche explained all to Coconnas; the worthy executioner was rendering him the greatest service in his power. He was sparing him not only pain, but moreover the shame of a confession, by driving, in place of oak wedges, wedges of leather, with the top only of wood; he thus left him all his strength to mount the scaffold manfully.

"Oh, excellent Caboche!" muttered Coconnas, "fear nothing; I will cry out loud enough."

Caboche had introduced a second wedge, larger than the first, and at a sign from the judge struck as if he were going to demolish the donjon of Vincennes at a blow.

"Ah! ah! *hou! hou!*" roared Coconnas, with a great variety of intonations, "take care! you are breaking my bones!"

"Ah," said the judge, smiling, "the second seems to take effect."

Coconnas panted like the bellows of a forge.

"What were you doing in the forest?" repeated the judge.

"Eh, *mordi!* I have already told you. I was enjoying the fresh air."

"Proceed."

"Confess," whispered Caboche

"What?"

"Anything; only confess."

And he dealt another blow on the wedge.

"Oh, oh!" cried Coconnas. "What do you wish to know, Monsieur? By whose order I was in the forest?"

"Yes."

"By the order of M. d'Alençon."

"Write that," said the judge.

"If I laid a snare for the King of Navarre," continued Coconnas, "I only obeyed my master's orders."

The clerk applied himself to writing down the confession.

"Ah, you denounced me, tallow-face!" thought Coconnas; "I will be even with you." And he related the visit of François to the King of Navarre, the interviews between Mouy and D'Alençon, and the history of the red mantle. He gave precise, terrible, incontestable evidence against D'Alençon, making it seem all the while as though his statements were extorted from him only by the intensity of his sufferings, — he grimaced, roared, and complained so naturally and in so many different tones; and the judge at last became terrified himself at having to record details so compromising to a prince of the blood.

"Ah," said Caboche, "here is a gentleman to whom it is n't necessary to speak more than once; and he gives the clerk enough to do. What, then, would he have said if the wedges had been of wood?"

The last wedge of the extraordinary was omitted; but without that nine had been used on Coconnas, which would have been sufficient to reduce his legs to a jelly. The judge withdrew, according so much advantage to Coconnas by reason of his confession, and left him alone with Caboche.

"Well," said the latter, "how do you find yourself, Monsieur?"

"Ah, excellent Caboche, I shall never forget what you have done for me!"

"You are right; for if they knew what I have done for you, I should soon take your place, and they would not amuse me with leathern wedges."

"But how came you to think?"

"I will tell you," said Caboche, twisting, for the sake of appearances, bandages of bloody linen about Coconnas's legs. "I knew you were arrested, that Queen Catherine wished to kill you; I guessed you would be put to the torture, and I took my measures accordingly."

"At the risk of what might happen to yourself?"

"Monsieur," replied Caboche, "you are the only gentleman who has ever given me his hand, and, executioner as I am, I have a heart; you shall see how I will perform my office to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Certainly, to-morrow."

"What office?"

Caboche stared. "You ask what office? Have you, then, forgotten the sentence?"

"Ah, true, I had forgotten all about that."

He had not forgotten it; but he was thinking of the chapel, the knife concealed beneath the napkin, of Henriette and the queen, of the door of the sacristy, the two horses that awaited them; of liberty, of the fresh air, of happiness and security beyond the bounds of France.

"Now," said Caboche, "I must get you from the rack to the litter. Do not forget that both your legs are broken, and that the least movement pains you."

"Ah! oh!" cried Coconnas, as the two assistants advanced.

"Take courage," said Caboche; "if you cry so now what will you do presently?"

"Maître Caboche," replied Coconnas, "I pray you lift me yourself, as I do not wish your two estimable acolytes to touch me."

"Place the litter near the rack," said Caboche.

The two assistants obeyed. Caboche then raised Coconnas in his arms as if he had been an infant, and placed him on the litter; but notwithstanding all his care, Coconnas uttered ferocious cries.

The jailer then appeared with a lantern. "To the chapel," said he.

The bearers and Coconnas started, after Coconnas had again given his hand to Caboche. The former grasp had been too useful to him for him to find any difficulty in repeating it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CHAPEL.

THE mournful *cortége* crossed in silence the two drawbridges of the fortress and the courtyard which leads to the chapel, through the windows of which a pale light colored the white faces of the apostles in red robes.

Coconnas eagerly breathed the night air, although it was heavy with rain. He looked at the darkness, and rejoiced to see that everything conspired to favor the flight of himself and his companion. It required all his resolution, prudence, and self-control to restrain him from leaping off his litter when on entering the chapel he saw in the choir, and at three paces from the altar, a mass of something wrapped in a large white mantle. It was La Mole.

"Since we are once more reunited," said Coconnas, in a voice of affected languor, "carry me to my friend."

The porters, having no orders to the contrary, readily obeyed that request.

La Mole was gloomy and pale; his head reclined against the marble wall, and his black hair, bathed with profuse perspiration, which gave to his countenance the paleness of ivory, seemed to have stood up on his head and stiffened so.

On a sign from the turnkey, the two valets went to seek the priest whom Coconnas had asked for. This was the signal agreed upon.

Coconnas followed them with anxious eyes; but his was not the only ardent look fixed on them. Scarcely had they disappeared when two women rushed from behind the altar, and hastened rapidly towards the choir.

Marguerite hurried towards La Mole and seized him in her arms. La Mole uttered a terrible cry, — a cry like those which Coconnas had heard in his cell.

"My God! what is the matter, then, La Mole?" said Marguerite, recoiling in terror.

La Mole uttered a deep groan, and put his hand to his eyes as if to avoid seeing Marguerite. Marguerite was even more alarmed by that silence and that gesture than by his cry of pain. "Oh!" she cried, "what is the matter, then? You are covered with blood!"

Coconnas, who had also rushed towards the altar, taken up the dagger, and had his arm round Henriette's waist, turned suddenly.

"Get up!" said Marguerite; "get up, I entreat you! You see the moment has arrived."

A smile, awful in its sadness, passed over La Mole's pale lips, which seemed as though they would never smile again.

"Beloved queen!" said the young man, "you have calculated without Catherine, and consequently without a crime. I have been put to the torture; my bones are broken, all my body is one wound, and the effort I make at this moment to press my lips upon your forehead causes me agony worse than death." And as he spoke, with great exertion, and ghastly pale, La Mole pressed his lips on the queen's brow.

"Torture!" cried Coconnas; "and so did I undergo it. But did not the executioner do for you what he did for me?" And Coconnas told all.

"Ah!" replied La Mole, "that is easily explained.

You gave him your hand on the day of our visit; I forgot that all men were brothers, and was disdainful. God punishes me for my pride. God be praised!"

La Mole clasped his hands. Coconnas and the two ladies exchanged a look of indescribable horror.

"Come, come," said the jailer, who had been to the door to listen, and had returned; "come along! Do not lose any time, my dear M. de Coconnas. Give me my blow with the dagger, and manage it like a worthy, kind gentleman, for they will soon be here."

Marguerite was kneeling beside La Mole, like one of the reclining figures on a tomb, made after the likeness of that which the tomb encloses.

"Come, my dear friend," said Coconnas; "courage! I am strong, and will carry you. I can place you on your horse, or hold you on my own, if you cannot keep yourself erect in the saddle. Come, let us go! let us go! You understand what the good fellow says: our lives are at stake."

La Mole made a superhuman, a sublime effort. "True," he said, "your life is at stake;" and he tried to rise. Annibal placed his arms under him and raised him up. La Mole during this time uttered only a low moaning; but at the moment when Coconnas left him to go to the turnkey, and the sufferer was supported only by the arms of two women, his legs bent under him, and in spite of all the efforts of the weeping Marguerite, he fell like an inert mass, and the piercing shriek he could no longer repress made the chapel echo through all its gloomy vaults.

"You see," said La Mole, in an agony of distress; "you see, my queen; so leave me, — leave me with one last adieu. I have not told anything, Marguerite; your secret is hidden in my love, and will die with me. Adieu, my queen, adieu!"

Marguerite, almost lifeless herself, threw her arms round that beautiful head, and imprinted on his brow a kiss that was almost holy.

"You, Annibal," said La Mole, — "you who have been spared these agonies, who are young and may escape, fly, fly, my friend, and give me the consolation of knowing that you are in safety!"

"The hour is passing," exclaimed the jailer. "Come, gentlemen, make haste!"

Henriette endeavored to lead Annibal gently away; while Marguerite was on her knees before La Mole, her hair dishevelled, and eyes overflowing with tears.

"Fly, Annibal!" repeated La Mole; "fly, and do not afford our enemies the joyful spectacle of the death of two innocent men."

Coconnas quietly disengaged himself from Henriette, who was urging him towards the door, and with a gesture so solemn as to be majestic, said, "Madame, first give the five hundred crowns we have promised to this man."

"Here they are," said Henriette.

Then turning towards La Mole and shaking his head sorrowfully, he said, "As for you, La Mole, you have done me an injury in thinking for one moment that I would leave you. Have I not sworn to live and die with you? But you are so great a sufferer, poor friend, that I forgive you." And he seated himself with a resolute air near his friend, towards whom he leaned his head, and whose forehead he touched with his lips. Then he drew gently to him, with the tenderness of a mother towards her child, the head of his friend, which glided from the wall, and rested on his breast.

Marguerite was gloomy; she had picked up the poniard which Coconnas had let fall.

"Oh, my queen!" cried La Mole, extending his hands

as he comprehended her purpose, "do not forget that I die in order to destroy the slightest suspicion of our love."

"What, then, can I do for you," exclaimed Marguerite, in despair, "if I must not die with you?"

"You can do that," replied La Mole, "which will make death pleasant to me, so that it will approach me almost with a smiling face."

Marguerite clasped her hands, and looked inquiringly at him.

"Do you remember the evening, Marguerite, when in exchange for the life I offered you then, and to-day lay down for you, you made me a sacred promise?"

Marguerite started.

"Ah, you do remember!" said La Mole, "for you shudder."

"Yes, yes, I remember," said Marguerite; "and on my soul, Hyacinthe, I will keep that promise." She extended her hand towards the altar, as if a second time to call on God to witness her oath.

La Mole's face lighted up as if the vaulted roof of the chapel had opened and a celestial light had descended upon him.

"They are coming!" exclaimed the jailer.

Marguerite uttered a cry, and hastened towards La Mole, but for fear of increasing his agony, she paused trembling before him.

Henriette pressed her lips on Coconnas's brow, and said to him, "I understand you, my Annibal, and I am proud of you. I know the heroism that makes you die, and I love you for that heroism. Before God, I will always love you more than anything living! and what Marguerite has sworn to do for La Mole, although I know not what it is, I will also do for you." And she held out her hand to Marguerite.

"It is good in you to say that; thank you," replied Coconnas.

"Before you leave me, my queen," said La Mole, "one last favor; give me some souvenir, that I may kiss it as I mount the scaffold."

"Ah, yes!" cried Marguerite, "here, take this!" And she untied from her neck a small reliquary of gold, fastened to a chain of the same metal. "Here," she said, "is a holy relic which I have worn from my childhood. My mother put it round my neck when I was very little, and while she still loved me. It was given by our uncle, Pope Clement, and has never left me. Take it!"

La Mole took it, and kissed it eagerly.

"They are opening the door," said the jailer. "Fly, ladies, fly!"

The two women hastened behind the altar, and disappeared. At the same moment the priest entered.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PLACE ST. JEAN EN GRÈVE.

It was seven o'clock in the morning; and the crowd was waiting, dense and riotous, in the squares, the streets, and upon the quays.

At six o'clock in the morning a tumbril — the same in which the two friends after their duel had been conveyed half dead to the Louvre — had set forth from Vincennes and slowly followed the Rue St. Antoine. On its route, the spectators, so huddled together that they crushed one another, seemed like statues, with their eyes fixed and their mouths open in wonderment. There was this day a heart-rending spectacle offered by the queen-mother to all the people of Paris.

In the tumbril we have mentioned as making its slow way from Vincennes were lying on some straw two young men, bareheaded and entirely clothed in black, leaning against each other. Coconnas supported on his knees La Mole, whose head appeared above the cross-bars of the tumbril, and whose eyes looked vaguely around him.

The crowd, eager to see even to the bottom of the vehicle, pressed, drove, heaved, lifted itself upon stones, clung to angles of the walls, and appeared satisfied when it contrived to gain a look at the two bodies which were going from suffering to destruction.

It had been reported that La Mole would die without having confessed one of the charges imputed to him; while on the contrary, Coconnas, it was asserted, could not

endure the torture, and had disclosed everything. So there were cries on all sides: "Look at the red one! It is he who confessed! It is he who owned everything! He is the coward who caused the death of the other, who is a brave fellow, and would not confess anything!"

The two young men heard all this, — the one the praises, and the other the insults, which accompanied their funereal journey; and while La Mole pressed the hands of his friend, a sublime expression of disdain overspread the features of the Piedmontese, who from the foul tumbril gazed on the stupid mob as if he were looking down from a triumphal car. Misfortune had done its heavenly work, — had ennobled the countenance of Coconnas, as death was about to render divine his soul.

"Are we nearly there?" asked La Mole; "for I can endure this no longer, my friend, and I feel as if I should faint."

"Rouse thee, rouse thee, La Mole! We are passing by the Rue Tizon and the Rue Cloche Percée. Look, look!"

"Oh, raise me, raise me, that I may once again behold that blessed house!"

Coconnas touched the executioner on the shoulder, as he sat on the tumbril and drove the horse. "Maître," he said, "do us the kindness to pause a moment in front of the Rue Tizon."

Caboche bowed his head in token of assent, and stopped. La Mole raised himself with a great effort, aided by Coconnas, and gazed with tearful eyes at the small house, now closed and silent as the tomb. A groan burst from his overcharged breast, and he said in a low voice, "Adieu, adieu, youth, love, life!" And his head fell on his breast.

"Courage!" said Coconnas; "we may perchance find all this above!"

"Do you think so?" murmured La Mole.

"I think so because the priest told me so, and more especially because I hope so. But do not faint, my friend, or these wretches will laugh at us."

Caboche heard these last words, and whipping his horse with one hand, he extended the other — unseen by any one — to Coconnas. It contained a small sponge saturated with a stimulant so powerful that after having smelt it and having it rubbed over his brow, La Mole felt himself revived and reanimated. "Ah!" he said, "I am born again." And he kissed the reliquary suspended from his neck.

When they reached the quay they saw the scaffold, which was elevated considerably above the ground.

"My friend," said La Mole, "I wish to die first."

Coconnas again touched the headsman's shoulder. "Maître," said he, "my friend has suffered more than I have, and therefore has less strength than I. He says it would pain him too much to see me die first; and besides, if I were to die before him he would have no one to support him on the scaffold."

"Good, good!" said Caboche, wiping away a tear with the back of his hand; "be easy, it shall be as you desire."

"And with one blow, eh?" said the Piedmontese, in a low tone.

"Yes, with one blow."

"'T is well; if you have to repeat, repeat upon me."

The tumbril stopped. They had arrived. Coconnas put on his hat. A murmur like that of the waves of the sea reached the ears of La Mole. He tried to rise, but his strength failed him; and Caboche and Coconnas were compelled to support him under his arms.

The place was paved with heads, and the steps of the Hôtel de Ville seemed an amphitheatre peopled with spec-

Fel. Oudart

tators; each window was filled with animated countenances. When they saw the handsome young man who could no longer support himself on his legs, bruised and broken, make a supreme effort to go unassisted to the scaffold, a vast sound was heard, like a cry of universal desolation; the men groaned, and the women uttered plaintive sighs.

"He was one of the grandest dons at the court," said one.

"How handsome he is! How pale he looks!" said the women. "He is the one who would not confess!"

"My friend," said La Mole, "I cannot support myself. Carry me!"

"Stay a moment," replied Coconnas.

He made a sign to the executioner, who moved aside; then, stooping, he lifted La Mole in his arms as if he had been an infant, and went up the steps to the scaffold with unfaltering foot, bore his burden firmly on to the platform, and put him down amid the frenzied shoutings and applause of the multitude. Coconnas returned the greeting by raising his hat from his head, and then threw it down on the scaffold beside him.

"Look round," said La Mole. "Do you see *them* anywhere?"

Coconnas glanced deliberately around him, and when his eyes reached a certain spot, paused. Then, without turning his eyes, he touched his friend on the shoulder, saying, "Look, look, at the window of that little tower!" With his other hand he pointed out to La Mole the small building which still exists at the corner of the Rue de la Vannerie and the Rue Mouton, — a remnant of past ages. Two women, clothed in black, were leaning on each other, somewhat retired from the window.

"Ah!" said La Mole, "I had but one fear, and that

was to die without again seeing her. I have seen her again, and now I can die." And with his eyes steadfastly fixed on the small window, he lifted the reliquary to his lips, and covered it with kisses.

Coconnas saluted the two women with as much grace as if he were in a drawing-room, and they replied to the two devoted men by shaking their handkerchiefs bathed in tears.

Caboche then touched Coconnas on his shoulder, and looked at him significantly. The Piedmontese replied, "Yes, yes." Then, turning to La Mole, he said to him, "One last embrace, dear friend, and die like a man! That will not be difficult for you, who are so brave."

"Ah," replied La Mole, "there will be no merit in me to die well, suffering the torments I do."

The priest approached and extended the crucifix to La Mole, who smiled and pointed to the reliquary he held in his hand.

"No matter," replied the priest, "still pray for strength from Him who suffered what you are about to suffer."

La Mole kissed the feet of the crucifix. "I am ready," said he.

"Can you hold your head upright?" asked Caboche, coming with his drawn sword behind La Mole, who was now on his knees.

"I hope so," was the reply.

"Then all will go well."

"But you," said La Mole, "will not forget what I requested of you; this reliquary will open the doors for you."

"Make yourself quite easy; and now try and hold your head up."

La Mole held his neck erect, and looking towards the little tower, said, "Adieu, Marguerite! bless —"

He did not finish; with one stroke of his keen and flashing sword Caboche severed from the body the head of La Mole, which rolled to Coconnas's feet. The body fell gently back, as if going to rest.

One cry arose from the lips of a thousand human beings; and among them Coconnas fancied he heard a shriek more piercing than all the rest.

"Thanks, good friend, thanks!" said Coconnas, extending his hand for the third time to the executioner.

"My son," said the priest to Coconnas, "have you nothing you would confess to God?"

"Faith! no, Father," replied the Piedmontese, "all I had to say I said to you yesterday." Then, turning to Caboche, he said, "Now then, headsman, my last friend, one more service!"

Before he knelt he turned on the multitude a look so calm, so full of resignation that a murmur of admiration came to soothe his ear and flatter his pride. Then, taking in his hands the head of his dear friend, and impressing a kiss on the purple lips, he gave one more look towards the little tower, and kneeling down, still holding the beloved head in his hands, he cried, "Now!"

He had scarcely uttered the word when Caboche with a sweep of his arm had cut his head from his body.

"It is time it was all over," said the worthy creature, trembling all over, "poor, poor fellow!"

He took with some difficulty from the clinched fingers of La Mole the reliquary of gold, and threw his cloak over the sad remains, which the tumbril had yet to convey to his abode.

The spectacle was over; the crowd dispersed.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE HEADSMAN'S TOWER.

Night spread her mantle over the city, still shuddering under the recollection of this spectacle, the details of which passed from mouth to mouth, to sadden in every home the happy hour of the family supper.

In contrast to the city, which was silent and mournful, the Louvre was joyous, noisy, and illuminated. There was a grand fête at the palace, — a fête commanded by Charles IX.; a fête which he had ordered for that evening at the same time he had ordered the execution for the morning.

The Queen of Navarre had received on the previous evening the king's orders to be present; and in the hope that La Mole and Coconnas would escape in the night, in the conviction that all measures had been well taken for their safety, she had promised her brother to comply with his desire. But when she had lost all hope after the terrible scene in the chapel; after she had, from a last impulse of that deep love which was the most decided and enduring of her life, been present at the execution, — she had firmly resolved that neither prayers nor threats should compel her to go to a boisterous festival at the Louvre the same day on which she had witnessed so terrible a scene at the Grève.

The king had on this day exhibited another proof of that power of will which no one perhaps ever displayed more energetically than Charles IX. In bed for a fort-

night, weak as a dying man, ghastly as a corpse, he yet arose at five o'clock, and was attired in his gayest habiliments. It is true that during his toilet he had fainted three times. About eight o'clock he inquired after his sister, if any one had seen her or knew where she was. No one could answer satisfactorily, for the queen had gone to her apartments about eleven o'clock, and refused admittance to everybody.

But there was no refusal for Charles. Leaning on the arm of M. de Nancey, he proceeded to the Queen of Navarre's apartments and entered suddenly by the secret door. Although he expected a melancholy sight, and had prepared himself for it, that which he beheld was even more distressing than he had anticipated.

Marguerite, half dead, was lying on the sofa, her head buried in the cushions. She neither wept nor prayed; ever since her return she had been groaning in bitterest anguish. At the other corner of the chamber, Henriette de Nevers, that daring woman, lay stretched on the carpet, without consciousness. On returning from the Grève, her strength had failed, as had Marguerite's; and poor Gillonne went from one to the other without daring to speak a word of consolation.

Charles desired Nancey to await him in the corridor, and entered, pale and trembling. Neither of the women saw him. Gillonne alone, who was at the moment endeavoring to revive Henriette, rose on her knee and looked at the king in terror. He made a sign with his hand, whereupon she rose, made an obeisance, and retired.

Charles approached Marguerite, looked at her for a moment in silence, and then in a tone of which his harsh voice might have been thought incapable, said, "Margot, my sister!"

The queen started and turned round. "Your Majesty!" she said.

"Come, Sister, courage!"

Marguerite raised her eyes to heaven.

"Yes," said Charles; "I know all; but listen to me."

The queen made a sign that she listened.

"You promised me to come to the ball," said Charles.

"I?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Yes; and after your promise, you are expected, and therefore if you do not come, everybody will be surprised at not seeing you."

"Excuse me, Brother," replied Marguerite; "you see how much I suffer."

"Exert yourself."

Marguerite endeavored for a moment to summon courage, and then suddenly giving way again, fell back upon the cushions. "No, no, I cannot go!" she said.

Charles took her hand, seated himself beside her on the sofa, and said, "You have just lost a dear friend, Margot, I know full well. But look at me, have not I lost all my friends, and, moreover, my mother? You have time to bewail as you now do; but I, in the midst of my severest griefs, am always forced to smile. You suffer, but look at me! I am dying. Well, then, Margot, come, courage! I demand it of you, my sister, in the name of our glory! Let us bear like a cross of suffering the fame of our house; let us bear it as the Lord bore his cross to the Mount of Calvary. And if on the way we falter like him, let us like him become again courageous and resigned."

"Oh, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Yes," said Charles, answering her thought, "yes, the sacrifice is severe, my sister; but every one has his trials, — some of their honor, others of their life. Do you suppose that I, with my twenty-five years, and the most

splendid throne in the world, do not regret dying? Well, then, look at me! My eyes, my complexion, my lips are those of a dying man; yet my smile — would not my smile make all the world believe that I still hope? But in a week, a month at most, you will weep for me, my sister, as you do for him who died to-day."

"My brother!" cried Marguerite, throwing her arms round Charles's neck.

"Come, dress yourself, dear Marguerite," said the king; "hide your paleness, and appear at the ball. I have desired that they should bring you some new jewels and ornaments worthy of your beauty."

"Oh, what are jewels and ornaments to me now?" exclaimed Marguerite.

"Life is long, Marguerite!" said Charles, with a smile, "at least, for you."

"No! no!"

"Sister, recollect one thing: it is sometimes by stifling, or rather dissimulating, our suffering that we show most honor to the dead."

"Well, Sire," said Marguerite, shuddering, "I will attend the ball."

A tear, rapidly dried upon his parched eyelid, moistened Charles's eye for a moment. He kissed his sister's brow, paused a moment before Henriette, who had not seen or heard him, and then retired, saying as he did so, "Poor girl!"

After the king's departure several pages entered, bearing boxes and caskets. Marguerite made a sign with her hand that they should be placed on the floor. The pages went out, and Gillonne alone remained.

"Get everything ready to dress me, Gillonne," said Marguerite.

The young girl looked at her mistress in astonishment.

"Yes," said Marguerite, in a tone of indescribable bit-

terness, — "yes, I shall dress. I am going to the ball; they expect me. Make haste, then; the day will so be complete, — the fête at the Grève in the morning, the fête at the Louvre in the evening."

"And the duchess?" asked Gillonne.

"Ah, she — she is quite happy; she can remain here; she can weep; she can suffer at her ease. She is not a king's daughter, a king's wife, a king's sister; she is not a queen. Help me to dress, Gillonne."

The young girl obeyed. The new ornaments sent by the king were splendid, and the dresses gorgeous. Marguerite had never been so beautiful. She looked at herself in a glass, and said, "My brother is right, — a human being is a miserable creature."

Gillonne entered at this moment. "Madame," she said, "here is a man asking for you."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know, but he is very horrid-looking; his very appearance made me tremble."

"Go and ask his name," said Marguerite, turning pale.

Gillonne went out, and returning after a few minutes, said, "He would not tell his name, Madame, but begged me to give you this." And Gillonne handed to Marguerite the reliquary which she had given to La Mole the night before.

"Oh, bring him hither! bring him hither!" said the queen, eagerly; and she became even paler and colder than she had been before.

A heavy step was heard upon the floor, and then a man appeared on the threshold.

"You are —" said the queen.

"He whom you saw one day near Montfaucon, Madame, and who conveyed in his tumbril two wounded gentlemen to the Louvre."

"Yes, yes, I recognize you; you are Maître Caboche."

"Executioner of the provostry of Paris, Madame."

These were the only words which Henriette had heard of all those that had been spoken around her for the last hour. She then raised her pale face from her two hands, and looked at the headsman with her emerald eyes, which seemed to dart flames.

"And you come —" said Marguerite, tremulously.

"To remind you of the promise made to the younger of the two gentlemen, — to him who charged me to return this reliquary to you. Do you recollect, Madame?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the queen, "and never shall more noble shade have nobler satisfaction. But where is *it?*"

"It is at my abode, with the body."

"Why did you not bring it?"

"I might have been stopped at the wicket of the Louvre, and compelled to open my cloak. What would have been said if a head had been discovered underneath it?"

"True, true; keep it at your house, and I will come for it to-morrow."

"To-morrow, Madame; to-morrow?" said Maître Caboche. "It may be too late!"

"And why so?"

"Because the queen-mother desired me to keep for her experiments in magic the heads of the first two criminals I should execute."

"Oh, profanation! the heads of our beloved! Henriette," exclaimed Marguerite, running towards her friend, whom she found standing up as if a spring had placed her on her feet, — "Henriette, my angel, do you hear what this man says?"

"Yes; and what are we to do?"

"We must accompany him;" and Marguerite threw a velvet cloak over her shoulders. "Come, come," she said; "we shall see them once more."

Marguerite ordered all the doors to be closed, and a litter to be brought to the private door; then she took Henriette by the arm, and going down the secret staircase, made a sign to Caboche to follow. At the door was her litter, and at the wicket they found Caboche's servant with a lantern.

Marguerite's bearers were trustworthy men, deaf and dumb, and surer than beasts of burden.

The litter went forward about ten minutes, preceded by Maître Caboche and his servant carrying the lantern; then it stopped. The executioner opened the door, while the servant went on. Marguerite alighted, and aided the Duchesse de Nevers. In their great grief, which thus tried them both, it was the nervous temperament that was the stronger.

"You may enter, ladies," said Caboche; "everybody is asleep in the tower."

In compliance with this invitation from the headsman, the two ladies, clinging to each other, passed through the entrance, and went along in darkness over a rugged and slippery pavement.

Caboche, with a torch in his hand, led them into a chamber, low, and blackened with smoke. In a conspicuous place was nailed to the wall a parchment sealed with the king's seal; it was the headsman's brevet. In a corner was a large sword with a long handle; it was the flaming sword of justice. Here and there were seen several large images, representing saints under different kinds of martyrdom.

Having arrived here, Caboche made a low bow. "Your Majesty will pardon me," he said, "if I have dared to pen-

etrate to the Louvre and conduct you hither; but it was the last and earnest wish of the gentleman. So — "

"You have done well, Maître," said Marguerite; "and here is a recompense for your zealous service."

Caboche eyed sorrowfully the purse well filled with gold, which Marguerite placed on the table. "Gold! gold! always gold!" he muttered. "Alas, Madame, would that I could redeem at the price of gold the blood I have been compelled to shed to-day!"

"Maître," replied Marguerite, with painful hesitation, "I do not see — "

"No, Madame, no; they are not here. But it is a sad spectacle, which I might have spared you by carrying, concealed in a cloak, what you have come to seek."

"No," said Marguerite, who had read in the eyes of her friend the same resolution which she had formed, — "no; show us the way, and we will follow."

Caboche took the torch and opened an oak door, which, opening upon the staircase, led by a few steps into a cellar. At the same moment a current of air passed, which made sparks fly from the torch, and brought up with it the nauseous smell of damp and blood.

Henriette, white as a marble statue, leaned on the arm of her friend, who moved with a more assured step; but at the first stair she staggered. "I shall never be able," she exclaimed.

"When we really love, Henriette," replied the queen, "we love even beyond death itself."

It was a sight at the same time distressing and pathetic, to see those two women, resplendent in youth, beauty, and attire, bending under this sordid and chalky vault, the weaker leaning on the stronger, and the stronger clinging to the headsman's arm.

They reached the lowest step. On the floor of this

cellar lay two human forms covered with a large cloth of black serge. Caboche raised a corner of the cloth, and lowering his torch, said, "Look, your Majesty!"

In their black attire, the two young men lay side by side in the fearful symmetry of death. Their heads, placed close on their bodies, seemed to be divided from them only by a red circle round the neck. Death had not separated their hands, for either by accident, or by the pious care of the headsman, the right hand of La Mole rested in the left hand of Coconnas. There was a look of love beneath the eyelids of La Mole; there was a smile of disdain under those of Coconnas.

Marguerite knelt down beside her lover, and with her hands glittering with jewels gently raised the head of him she had loved so well.

The Duchesse de Nevers, leaning against the wall, could not take her eyes off that pale face she had so often gazed upon with joy and love.

"La Mole! dear La Mole!" murmured Marguerite.

"Annibal! Annibal!" cried the duchess, "so handsome, so proud, so brave, you will speak to me no more!" and a torrent of tears gushed from her eyes.

That woman, so disdainful, so bold, so insolent in happiness, who pushed scepticism to the extreme of doubt, and passion even to cruelty, — that woman had never thought of death.

Marguerite then put into a bag embroidered with pearls and perfumed with the finest essences the head of La Mole, which looked still more striking when in contact with the velvet and gold, and whose beauty a peculiar preparation, used at the period in royal embalmings, could not fail to preserve. Henriette folded the head of Coconnas in the skirt of her mantle. And both, bending beneath their poignant sorrow, ascended the stairs, after

one last lingering look at the loved remains which they were leaving to the mercy of an executioner, in this gloomy den of common criminals.

"Fear nothing, Madame," said Caboche, who comprehended the look. "The gentlemen shall be buried in holy ground; this I swear to you."

"And you will have masses said for their souls, which this will pay for," said Henriette, taking from her neck a magnificent necklace of rubies, which she gave to the headsman.

They returned to the Louvre, and the queen, going to her own apartments, deposited the melancholy relic in the cabinet of her bedchamber, destined from that moment to be an oratory. Then, leaving Henriette in her room, the queen, paler and lovelier than ever, about ten o'clock entered the splendid ball-room, — the same in which we saw the first chapter of our history open, some two years previously.

All eyes were turned towards her, and she supported the universal gaze with a proud and almost joyous look, for she had religiously accomplished the dying wish of her friend.

Charles, when he saw her, passed through the gilded throng, and said aloud, "Thanks, my dear sister!" and then, in a lower tone, "Mind! you have a spot of blood upon your arm."

"Of what consequence is that, Sire, if I have a smile upon my lips?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SWEAT OF BLOOD.

Some days after the terrible scene we have related, — that is, on the 30th of May, 1574, — the court was at Vincennes, when suddenly a great noise was heard in the chamber of the king, who had been attacked with an increase of his disorder in the midst of the grand ball he had given the very day of the young men's execution, and by advice of his physicians had come to Vincennes for change of air.

It was eight o'clock in the morning; a small group of courtiers was assembled in the antechamber, when all at once a cry was heard, the nurse appeared at the door of the royal apartment, her eyes bathed in tears, and called out, "Help! help for the king!"

"The king is worse, then?" said Nancey, whom, as we have seen, Charles had released from the service of Catherine, and had attached to his own person.

"Oh, summon the doctors! summon the doctors!" cried the nurse.

Mazille and Ambroise Paré attended the king by turns, and Paré, having seen Charles fall asleep, had profited by the opportunity to retire for a few moments. Meantime Charles had broken into a profuse perspiration, and as he suffered from a relaxation of the capillary vessels, which occasions hemorrhage of the skin, this bloody sweat had alarmed the nurse, who, being a Protestant, declared it was a judgment for the blood shed in the massacre of

Saint Bartholomew. Every one hastened in search of the doctor, in order to display his zeal and activity.

A door suddenly opened, and Catherine appeared; she crossed the antechamber and entered the king's apartment. Charles was lying back upon the bed, his eyes closed, and his chest heaving; his body was covered with a reddish perspiration, and from the end of each finger hung a drop of blood.

At the sound of steps Charles looked up and beheld his mother. "Excuse me, Madame," said he, "I would die in peace."

"Die, my son," said Catherine, "in a passing attack of this wretched malady? Do you wish, then, to drive us to despair?"

"I tell you, Madame, that I perceive my soul going out of me. I tell you, Madame, — death of all the devils! — that it is Death who approaches me. I feel what I feel, and I know what I tell you."

"Sire," said the queen, "your mind is diseased. Since the death of those two assassins, La Mole and Coconnas, your bodily sufferings ought to have abated; and as for your mental anguish, if I had ten minutes' conversation with you, I could prove — "

"Nurse," interrupted Charles, "let no one enter; the Queen Catherine de Médicis wishes to speak with her beloved son, Charles IX."

The nurse obeyed.

"This interview must have taken place," continued he, "sooner or later, and perhaps to-morrow it may be too late; but a third person must be present."

"Why?"

"Because, I repeat," said Charles, with a terrible solemnity, "Death is at the door of this chamber, and may enter at any moment; and it is time, since last night I

arranged my personal affairs, to put in order this morning the affairs of the kingdom."

"And who is this third person?"

"My brother, Madame; have him summoned."

"Sire," said the queen, "I see with pleasure that those denunciations, dictated by hate rather than wrested from suffering, have not left any prejudice on your mind. Nurse! Nurse!"

The nurse appeared.

"Nurse," said Catherine, "when M. de Nancey comes, order him in the king's name to summon M. d'Alençon."

Charles made a sign to the nurse to stay.

"I said my brother," he exclaimed.

Catherine's eyes glistened with rage, but an imperious gesture of Charles stopped her.

"I wish to speak with my brother Henri," continued he; "Henri alone is my brother, — not the one who is king yonder, but the one who is a prisoner here. Henri shall know my last wishes."

"And do you think," cried the queen, daring (so great was her hate to Henri) to brave Charles's anger, — "do you think that if you are really, as you say, dying, I will yield to any one, to a stranger, my right as a queen and as a mother to be present at your last moments?"

"Madame," said Charles, "I am yet king; I yet command. I have told you that I wish to speak to my brother Henri; and will you not summon my captain of the guards? Thousand devils! I warn you that I am yet strong enough to go for him myself." And Charles half rose from the bed.

"Sire," cried Catherine, detaining him, "think what you do; as for me, the laws of nature and of etiquette alike bid me stay."

"By what title do you stay?"

"By that of your mother."

"You are no more my mother than D'Alençon is my brother."

"You rave, Monsieur," said Catherine. "Since when is she who gives life no longer the mother of him who has received it?"

"From the moment, Madame, when that unnatural mother takes what she gives," said Charles, trying to wipe from his lips a bloody foam.

"What mean you, Charles? I do not understand you," murmured Catherine, her eyes dilated with astonishment.

"You will understand me, Madame."

Charles felt under his pillow, and drew forth a small silver key. "Take this key; open my travelling-casket there, and you will find papers that will speak for me." He pointed to a casket of carved oak, fastened with a silver lock, that stood in the centre of the apartment.

Catherine, controlled in spite of herself by Charles's superior attitude towards her, opened the casket; but no sooner had she done so than she recoiled as if she had seen a serpent inside it.

"What do you see that alarms you, Madame?" asked Charles.

"Nothing," said Catherine.

"Then put your hand in, and give me a book; for there is one there, is there not?"

"Yes," faltered Catherine.

"A book of venery?"

"Yes."

"Bring it to me."

Catherine, trembling in every limb, did as he bade her. "Fatality!" she murmured.

"Listen," continued Charles. "This book — I was foolish — I loved the chase above everything — I read this book too much. Do you understand, Madame?"

Catherine uttered a suppressed groan.

"It was a folly!" said Charles. "Burn it, Madame; the world must not know the weaknesses of kings."

Catherine advanced to the fire, cast the fatal book in, and stood, motionless and haggard, watching the blue flames that devoured the poisoned leaves of the volume. As it burned, a strong odor, like garlic, pervaded the apartment. The book was soon entirely consumed.

"And now, Madame," said the king, with irresistible majesty, "summon my brother."

Catherine, overwhelmed, crushed beneath a complicated emotion she could not analyze, left the room. "Curse him!" cried she, as she passed the threshold. "He triumphs! he reaches the goal! Curse him! curse him!"

"Henri! my brother Henri!" cried Charles, following his mother with his voice; "I wish to see him instantly, to speak about the regency."

At this moment Ambroise Paré entered by the opposite door. "Who has been burning arsenic here?" said he.

"I have," replied Charles.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PLATFORM OF THE DONJON AT VINCENNES.

Henri de Navarre was walking alone on the terrace of the donjon. He knew the court was at the château, and it seemed to him that he could see through the walls Charles on his death-bed. It was a summer's eve. A broad ray of light bathed the distant plains, and gilded the stems of the old oaks in the forest.

But it was not on these objects that Henri fixed his attention; he was gazing, in thought, on the capital of France.

"Paris!" murmured he; "Paris! where the Louvre is, — the Louvre, where the throne is! and here do these ramparts shut me out from thee, to confine me with my mortal enemy!"

As his thoughts wandered from Paris back to Vincennes, he saw on the left in a valley a man whose cuirass sparkled in the sunbeams. This man was on a splendid charger, and led another. The king fixed his eyes on this cavalier, and saw him draw his sword, place his handkerchief on it, and wave it in the air. Instantly the signal was repeated from the next hill, and continued until the king saw it extend all round the château. It was Mouy and his Huguenots, who, knowing the king was dying, and fearing lest Henri's life should be in danger, had come together in readiness to defend or to attack.

Henri shaded his eyes with his hand, and recognizing the cavalier, "Mouy!" he cried, as though his friend could hear him. And in his joy at finding himself thus surrounded by friends, he raised his hat and waved his scarf. All the handkerchiefs were again waved. "Ah, they wait for me!" said he. "I cannot join them. Why did I not do so when it was in my power?" And he made a despairing gesture, that Mouy returned by another, which meant, "I will wait."

At this moment Henri heard steps on the stairs. He suddenly withdrew. The Huguenots understood the cause of that retreat. Swords were resheathed, and the handkerchiefs disappeared.

Henri saw, and not without a secret dread, his mortal foe, Catherine de Médicis, appear on the terrace. Behind her were two guards, who stopped at the head of the staircase.

"Oh," thought he, "it must be something important, indeed, that makes her come and seek me on the platform of the donjon of Vincennes."

Catherine sat down on a stone bench to recover her breath. Henri approached her. "Are you seeking me, Madame?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Catherine; "I wished to give you a proof of my attachment. The king is dying and wishes to see you."

"Me?" said Henri, starting with joy.

"Yes. He thinks that not content with desiring the throne of Navarre, you covet that of France also."

"Oh, Madame!"

"I know it is not true, but he believes it, and lays a snare for you."

"What will he, then, offer me?"

"How do I know? — impossibilities, perhaps."

"But have you no idea?"

"No; but I imagine, for instance —"

"What?"

"I imagine that believing you to entertain those ambitious views that have been reported to him, he wishes to gain from your own lips the proof of that ambition. Suppose that he should tempt you, as other men have been tempted, to secure a confession without recourse to torture; suppose," Catherine continued, looking fixedly at Henri, "that he should propose to you a share in the government, — a regency, even."

Henri felt a thrill of joy pervade him, but he saw the snare and avoided it.

"Oh," said he, "the trick would be too palpable; offer me the regency, when there is yourself, when there is D'Alençon!"

"You will refuse it, then?" replied Catherine.

"The king is dead," thought Henri; "she has laid a trap for me. — I must hear what the king says, Madame, for you know all this is but supposition."

"Doubtless; but you can tell me your intentions."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Henri, "I have no pretensions, and so can have no intentions."

"That is no answer," replied Catherine; "but to be short with you, — for there is no time to lose, — if you accept the regency you are a dead man."

"The king lives," thought Henri. — "Madame," said he, firmly, "God will inspire me, for the hearts of kings are in his hands. I am ready to see his Majesty."

"Reflect, Monsieur!"

"During two years that I have been persecuted, and a month that I have been a prisoner," said Henri, gravely, "I have had time for reflection; and I have reflected, Madame. Favor me, therefore, by informing the king of

my coming. These two guards would prevent my escape, even did I contemplate flight, which I do not."

Catherine saw she could do nothing more, and hastily descended.

No sooner had she disappeared than Henri made a sign to Mouy, that meant, "Draw nearer and be ready for any event." Mouy, who had dismounted, sprang into the saddle, and advanced to within a musket-shot of the château. Henri thanked him by a gesture, and hastened after the queen. On the first landing he found the two sentinels awaiting him. A double troop of Swiss and light-horse guarded the court, and to enter or leave the château it was necessary to pass between two rows of halberds. Catherine was waiting there for him.

"Look!" said she, laying her hand on his arm; "this court has two gates. At this, behind the king's apartments, if you refuse the regency, a good horse and freedom await you; if you follow the dictates of ambition, you must come by this. What say you?"

"I say that if the king makes me regent, I, and not you, shall command these soldiers."

"Madman!" murmured Catherine; "be warned, and do not play at life and death with me!"

"Why not," said Henri, "since up to this time I have been the gainer?"

"Go to the king's apartments, Monsieur, since you will not listen to me," said Catherine, pointing to the stairs with one hand, while the other sought the handle of one of the poisoned daggers she wore at her girdle in the shagreen case which has become historical.

"Pass before me, Madame," said Henri; "until I am regent, you have the precedence."

Catherine, foiled at every point, made no resistance, but ascended the stairs before Henri.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE REGENCY.

The king had become impatient, and was on the point of sending Nancey in search of Henri, when the latter appeared. On seeing him, Charles uttered a cry of joy. Henri stood appalled as if in the presence of a corpse. The two doctors and the priest, who were with the king, instantly rose and left the chamber.

Charles was not greatly beloved, and yet all the courtiers in the antechambers were weeping. At the death of every king, good or bad, there are some persons who fear they shall lose by it.

Charles smiled mournfully. "Come here, Henriot," said he, holding out his hand to him; "come here. I was unhappy at not seeing you, for, believe me, I have often reproached myself with having tormented you; but a king cannot control events, and besides, my mother and D'Anjou and D'Alençon, and something else, which now that I am dying does not influence me, influenced me then, — State policy."

"Sire," replied Henri, "I recollect only the love I have always borne you as my brother, and my respect for you as my king."

"Ah, you are right, and I am grateful to you for speaking so, Henriot; for in fact you have suffered much under my reign, without remembering that during its continuance your poor mother has died. But you have been able

to see how I am pressed. Sometimes I resist; but sometimes also I yield through weariness. But, as you have said, let us speak no more of the past; it is the present which presses me now, and the future frightens me." And in saying these words the poor king hid his white face behind his fleshless hands. After a moment's silence he continued, "We must save the State; we must not let it fall into the hands of fanatics or women."

Charles spoke these words in a low tone, and yet Henri fancied he heard behind the curtain a suppressed exclamation of rage. Perhaps an opening in the wall, made at the instance of Charles himself, enabled Catherine to overhear that last conversation.

"Of women?" said Henri, anxious to provoke an explanation.

"Yes, for my mother would like to be regent until D'Anjou's return; but I tell you that he will not return."

"How, not return?" cried Henri, his heart beating joyfully.

"No, his subjects will not let him."

"But do you not think the queen-mother has already written to him?"

"Yes; but Nancey stopped the courier at Château-Thierry, and brought me the letter, in which she said I was dying. I wrote to Warsaw myself, and D'Anjou will be carefully watched, so that in all probability the throne will become vacant."

Another angry sound was heard behind the tapestry.

"She is there," thought Henri, "and is listening."

Charles heard nothing. "I die without male heirs," he continued. Then, stopping suddenly, he looked at the King of Navarre. "Do you recollect, Henriot," said he, "the little boy I showed you one night, sleeping peace-

fully in his cradle, and watched over by an angel? Alas, they will kill him also!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Henri, with tears in his eyes; "I swear to you that I will watch over and protect him with my life."

"Thanks, Henriot, thanks!" said the king, gratefully; "I accept your promise. Do not make him a king, — fortunately, he is not born to a throne, — but make him happy. I leave him an ample fortune; as to rank, may he have his mother's nobility, that of the heart! Perhaps it would be better that he should be educated for the Church; he would inspire less apprehension. Oh! it seems to me I could die, if not happy, at least tranquil, could I have, to console me here, the child's caresses and the sweet face of the mother."

"Sire, could they not come?"

"Eh! they would never go out from here. Such is the lot of kings, Henriot. They can neither live nor die as they would. But since your promise I am more resigned."

Henri reflected. "I have promised," said he; "but can I fulfil my word?"

"What do you mean?"

"Shall I not be persecuted, and in more danger than he is, since I am a man, and he but an infant?"

"You are mistaken," said Charles. "After my death you will be great and powerful; and here is what will give you power."

At these words he drew a parchment from under his pillow. "Here!" said he.

Henri hastily glanced over the document adorned with the royal seal.

"The regency for me, Sire?" said he, turning pale with joy.

"Yes, until D'Anjou's return; and as he will not return, in all probability it is the throne I give you."

"The throne to me!" murmured Henri.

"You alone are worthy of it; you alone capable of governing. D'Alençon is a traitor; leave him in the prison to which I have consigned him. My mother will seek to kill you; banish her. D'Anjou, in three months, in four months, in a year perhaps, will leave Poland and come to contest your power; reply to him by a papal bull. I have already arranged that matter, through my ambassador, the Duc de Nevers, and you will receive the document shortly."

"Oh, my king!"

"You have but one thing to fear, — civil war; but by remaining converted, you will avoid that. The Protestants can do nothing unless you are at their head, and Condé is not strong enough to contend against you. The King of France should be King of the Catholics, and not King of the Huguenots; for the King of France should be king of the majority. They say I feel remorse for the Bartholomew. Doubts, yes! remorse, no! They say I bleed at every pore the blood then shed; what flows from me is arsenic, and not blood."

"Oh, what do you mean, Sire?"

"Nothing; God will, if he think fit, avenge my death. I leave you a faithful parliament and a trusty army. They will protect you against your only enemies, — my mother and D'Alençon."

At this moment the sound of arms and of military orders was heard in the vestibule.

"I am lost," murmured Henri.

"You fear; you hesitate," said Charles, with anxiety.

"I, Sire?" Henri replied. "No, I do not fear; no, I do not hesitate. I accept."

Charles pressed his hand; and as at that moment his nurse drew near with a potion which she had just prepared in a neighboring chamber, without being aware that within a few feet of where she was, the destiny of France was at stake, "Nurse," he said, "summon my mother and M. d'Alençon."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE KING IS DEAD! GOD SAVE THE KING!

CATHERINE and D'Alençon, pale with fear and trembling with rage, entered a few minutes later. As Henri had conjectured, the queen had overheard all, and had in a few words acquainted D'Alençon with what had occurred. Henri stood by the head of the king's bed.

The king announced to them his will. "Madame," said he to his mother, "if I had a son he would be king, and you would be regent; in your stead, did you decline, the King of Poland; in his stead, did he decline, D'Alençon. But I have no son, and the throne belongs to D'Anjou, who is absent. Since he will sometime return to reclaim that throne, I do not wish him to find in his place a man who, with claims almost equal to his own, might dispute his rights, and so expose the kingdom to the danger of civil war. I do not make you regent because it would be painful for you to choose between your two sons. I do not make D'Alençon regent because he might say to D'Anjou, 'You had a throne; why have you abandoned it?' No; I have chosen a regent who can take the crown as a trust, and will keep it under his hand, and not on his head. Salute him, Madame; salute him, D'Alençon. It is the King of Navarre!" And with a gesture of supreme authority he himself saluted Henri. Catherine and D'Alençon made a motion between a shudder and a salute.

"Here, my Lord Regent," said Charles, "is the parchment that until the return of D'Anjou gives you command of the armies, the keys of the treasury, royal right and power."

Catherine devoured Henri with her eyes; D'Alençon trembled so that he could hardly stand. But that feebleness of the one and firmness of the other, instead of reassuring Henri, showed him that danger was at hand. Making a violent effort, he took the warrant from Charles, and drawing himself up to his full height, fixed his eyes on the queen as if to say, "Beware, I am your master!"

Catherine understood that look. "No, never!" said she; "never shall my race yield to a foreign one! Never shall a Bourbon reign while a Valois remains!"

"Mother!" cried Charles, sitting up, "take care! I am yet king, — for only a short time, I am aware; but not much time is needed to give an order. It does not require much time to punish murderers and poisoners."

"Very well, give the order if you dare; I am going now to give mine. Come, François, come." And she left the room, followed by D'Alençon.

"Nancey!" cried Charles; "Nancey, arrest my mother; arrest my brother; arrest —" A stream of blood choked his utterance.

Nancey entered; he had heard only his name. The orders which followed, uttered in a voice less distinct, had been lost in space.

"Guard the door," said Henri, "and let no one enter!"

Nancey bowed, and left the apartment. Henri looked at the dying king. "The fatal moment has come," said he. "Shall I reign? Shall I live?"

"Live, Sire!" said a voice.

The tapestry of the alcove was lifted, and René's pale face appeared.

"René?" cried Henri.

"Yes, Sire."

"Your prediction was false, then; I shall not be king?"

"You shall be; but the time has not yet come."

"How do you know? Speak!"

"Listen!"

"I listen."

"Stoop!"

Henri leaned over the bed, and René did the same; between them lay the body of the dying king.

"Listen!" said René. "Placed here by the queen-mother to undo you, I prefer to serve you, for I have faith in your horoscope; and I find it to be for the interest both of my body and of my soul to serve you."

"Is it the queen-mother who bade you tell me that?" said Henri, full of doubt and anxiety.

"No," said René; "but listen to a secret, which I alone know, and which I will disclose to you if you will swear upon this dying king to forgive me the death of your mother."

"I have already promised you once," said Henri, his face darkening.

"Promised, but not sworn," said René, making a movement to withdraw.

"I swear it," said Henri, extending his hand over the head of the king.

"Well, Sire," said the Florentine, hastily, "the King of Poland will soon be here!"

"No, for the king stopped the courier at Château-Thierry."

"The queen had sent three, by different routes."

"Oh, I am lost!" said Henri.

"A messenger arrived this morning from Warsaw. No

one knows of Charles's illness there, and D'Anjou left that city without opposition. The courier preceded him only by a few hours."

"Oh, had I but eight days!" muttered Henri.

"You have not eight hours! did you not hear the noise of the arms in the vestibule? The soldiers will come even here to kill you."

"The king is not dead yet."

"No," said René, "but he will be in ten minutes; you have, then, ten minutes to live, perhaps less."

"What shall I do, then?"

"Fly instantly."

"How? If I cross the vestibule, they will kill me there."

"Listen! I risk everything for you; do not forget it."

"Be assured."

"Follow me through this passage; I will conduct you to the postern. Then, to give you time I will go and tell the queen that you are coming; they will think afterwards that you have discovered the secret door and escaped."

Henri stooped and kissed Charles's forehead.

"Adieu, my brother!" said he; "I will not forget your last wish was to see me king. Die in peace! In the name of my brethren I forgive you their blood you have spilled."

"Quick! quick!" said René; "he is coming to himself! Fly, before he opens his eyes; fly!"

"Nurse!" murmured Charles, "Nurse!"

Henri seized Charles's sword, thenceforth useless to the dying king, placed in his breast the parchment that made him regent, pressed his lips again to Charles's forehead, and disappeared by the secret passage.

"Nurse!" cried the king, in louder tones, "Nurse!"

The good woman hastened to him. "What do you want, Charlot?" cried she.

"Nurse," said the king, his eyelids open and his eyes dilated in the terrible fixedness of death, "something has happened while I slept. I see a great light; I see God, our Master; I see the Lord Jesus; I see the blessed Virgin Mary. They pray for me; they intercede for me. The Lord all-powerful pardons me; he calls me. My God, my God, receive me into thy pity! My God, forget that I have been a king, for I come to thee without a sceptre and without a crown! My God, forget the crimes of the king, in remembering the sufferings of the man! My God, I come!"

Charles, as he proceeded in the utterance of these words, raised himself more and more, as if to go forward in response to the voice which called him. After these last words, he breathed a sigh and fell back motionless and cold into his nurse's arms.

Meantime, Henri, guided by René, traversed the passage, passed through the postern, and springing on his horse, galloped towards the place where he knew he should find Mouy.

The sentinels, hearing the horse, moved forward and cried, "He flies! he flies!"

"Who flies?" said the queen, going to a window.

"The King of Navarre!"

"Fire on him! fire!" said the queen.

The sentinels levelled their pieces; but the king was out of reach.

"He flies!" said Catherine; "he is vanquished, then!"

"He flies!" muttered D'Alençon; "I am king, then!"

But at the same moment, and while François and his mother were at the window, the drawbridge creaked under the feet of horses; and preceded by a clash of arms and

by a great noise, a young man, riding at a gallop, his hat in his hand, entered the court, crying, "France ! " followed by four gentlemen, covered, like himself, with sweat, dust, and foam.

"My son ! " cried Catherine, joyfully.

"My mother ! " replied the young man, springing to the ground.

"D'Anjou ! " exclaimed François, thunderstruck.

"Am I too late ? " said Henri d'Anjou.

"No, you are just in time ; and had God led you by the hand, your arrival could not have been more seasonable. Look ; listen ! "

At this moment Nancey appeared at the balcony of the king's apartments ; all eyes were fixed on him. He broke a wand in two pieces and extended his arms, holding a fragment in either hand. "King Charles IX. is dead ! King Charles IX. is dead ! King Charles IX. is dead ! " cried he, three times. And he let fall the fragments of the wand.

"Long live King Henri III. ! " said Catherine, crossing herself, — "long live King Henri III. ! "

All repeated the cry, with the exception of D'Alençon. "Ah ! she has betrayed me," said he, tearing his breast with his finger-nails.

"I have conquered," cried Catherine ; "and the odious Béarnais will not reign ! "

EPILOGUE.

A YEAR had elapsed since the death of Charles IX. and the accession of his successor. King Henri III., happily reigning by the grace of God and of his mother Catherine, had gone in a fine procession in honor of Nôtre Dame de Clery. He had gone on foot with the queen, his wife, and all the court.

King Henri III. was able to afford himself this little pastime, for no serious business occupied him at the moment. The King of Navarre was in Navarre, where he had so long desired to be, and they said was very much taken up with a beautiful girl of the blood of the Montmorencies, whom he called La Fosseuse (dimple-cheek). Marguerite was with him, sad and gloomy, and finding only in her beautiful mountains, not an amusement, but a soother of the two great griefs of human life, — absence and death.

Paris was very quiet; and the queen-mother, really regent since her dear son Henri had become king, resided sometimes at the Louvre, sometimes at the Hôtel de Soissons.

One evening when she was deeply occupied in studying the stars with René, whose little treason she had never detected, and who had been reinstated in her favor after the false testimony he had so opportunely borne against La Mole and Coconnas, she was informed that a man desired to see her who said that he had a matter of the

utmost importance to communicate. She went hastily to her oratory, and found M. Maurevel.

"*He* is here!" exclaimed the ancient captain of the petardeers, not giving Catherine time to address him, according to royal etiquette.

"He! who?" she asked.

"Who can it be, Madame, but the King of Navarre?"

"Here?" cried Catherine. "Here? He? Henri? And what is the madman doing here?"

"If appearances may be trusted, he has come to see Madame de Sauve; if probabilities are considered, he comes to conspire against the king."

"How do you know he is here?"

"Because I saw him enter a house yesterday, and, very soon afterwards Madame de Sauve joined him there."

"Are you sure it was he?"

"I waited until he came out; that is to say, a part of the night. At three o'clock the two lovers appeared. The king conducted Madame de Sauve to the wicket of the Louvre. There the porter, who is no doubt in her interest, admitted her; she entered without interruption, and the king returned, humming a tune, and with a step as free and unconcerned as if he were among his mountains in Béarn."

"And whither did he betake himself?"

"Rue de l'Arbre Sec, to the Hôtel de la Belle Étoile, the same inn where the two sorcerers lodged whom your Majesty executed last year."

"Why did you not come and inform me the moment you first saw him?"

"Because I was not quite sure of my man."

"While now —"

"Now I am."

"You saw him, then?"

"Plainly. I concealed myself at the wine-shop in front of the house, and saw him enter the same place as on the previous night. Then, as Madame de Sauve was late, he imprudently put his face against the window on the first floor, and then I had no further doubt. Besides, a few moments afterwards Madame de Sauve came and rejoined him."

"And do you think they will remain, as they did last night, until three o'clock in the morning?"

"It is probable."

"Where is the house you mention?"

"Near the Croix des Petits Champs, close by St. Honoré."

"Very good!" replied Catherine. "Does M. de Sauve know your handwriting?"

"No," said Maurevel.

Sit down there and write."

Maurevel obeyed.

"I am ready, Madame," said he.

Catherine dictated: —

"While the Baron de Sauve is on service at the Louvre, his wife is with her lover in a house near the Croix des Petits Champs, Rue St. Honoré. The baron will recognize the house by a red cross on the wall."

"Well?"

"Now make a copy of this letter."

Maurevel did so.

"Now," continued the queen, "let this note be given by a skilful messenger to the baron, and let that messenger drop the other in the corridor of the Louvre."

"I do not understand."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders.

"You do not see that a husband who receives such a letter must be angry."

"In the King of Navarre's time he was not offended."

"Do you not know there is a great difference between a king and a plain lover? Besides, if he is not offended, you will be offended for him."

"I?"

"Yes; take four or six men, masked. You burst open the door; you surprise the lovers; you strike in the baron's name. And the next day, the letter found in the Louvre proves that it is the husband who revenged himself, — only it happened that the lover was the King of Navarre; but who could think he was there, when every one believed he was at Pau?"

Maurevel looked at Catherine with admiration, bowed, and withdrew.

Just as he left the Hôtel de Soissons, Madame de Sauve entered the house of the Croix des Petits Champs. Henri was waiting for her.

"Have you been followed?" said he.

"No," said Charlotte, "not that I am aware of."

"I think I have; not only to-night, but last evening also."

"Oh, Sire, you terrify me. I should be inconsolable if anything were to happen to you."

"Fear nothing, love," said the Béarnais, "three faithful followers watch over me."

"Only three? that is small protection, Sire."

"Three are sufficient when they are called Mouy, Saucourt, and Barthélemy."

"Mouy is then at Paris? Has he, like you, some poor woman madly in love with him?"

"No; but a mortal enemy, whose death he has sworn to compass. Nothing else but hate, my dear,

makes men commit such follies as they commit in love."

"Thank you, Sire!"

"Oh, I do not speak of our present follies, but those past and to come. But let us leave off this conversation, for my time is short."

"You leave Paris, then?"

"To-night."

"Your affairs in Paris are finished?"

"My only business was to see you."

"Gascon!"

"My love, it is true; but we have a few more hours to pass together and then we separate forever."

"Oh, Henri," said Charlotte, "nothing but my love lasts forever."

Meantime, as the King of Navarre had said, Mouy and his two companions were concealed in the neighborhood of the house. It was arranged that Henri should leave the house at twelve o'clock, that he and his companions should escort Madame de Sauve to the Louvre, and should go from thence to the Rue de Cerisaie, where Maurevel dwelt.

The three Huguenots had been on guard about an hour when they saw a man, followed at some distance by five others, approach the door of the house, and apply successively several keys to the lock.

At this sight, Mouy sprang from his concealment, and catching the man by the arm, "Stay!" said he, "you do not enter there!"

The man started, and his hat fell off. "M. de Mouy de Saint-Phale!" cried he.

"Maurevel!" thundered the Huguenot, brandishing his sword; "I sought you, and you come to find me!" But he did not forget Henri, and turning to the window,

he whistled like the Béarnese shepherds. "That is sufficient," said he to Saucourt. "Now, then, murderer!" and he sprang towards Maurevel.

Maurevel had had time to draw a pistol from his belt, and levelling it at the young man, "This time," said the King's Killer, "you are dead."

But Mouy sprang on one side, and the ball passed by him. "It is my turn now!" cried he; and he dealt Maurevel so terrible a thrust with his rapier that although it hit his leather belt, the sharp point went through that obstacle and penetrated the flesh.

Maurevel uttered so piercing a cry that his followers thought he was killed, and ran away down the Rue St. Honoré.

Maurevel, seeing himself abandoned, took to flight, crying, "Help! help!" Mouy, Saucourt, and Barthélemy pursued him hotly.

As they entered the Rue de Grenelle, a man sprang out of a window on the first floor. It was Henri. Warned by Mouy's signal, and by the report of the pistol, that something had occurred, he hastened to the assistance of his friends. Active and vigorous, he dashed after them, sword in hand.

A cry guided him. It came from the Barrier des Sergens; it was Maurevel, who, hard pressed by Mouy, called again for help. He was forced to turn or else be run through the back. He turned, therefore, and thrust fiercely at Mouy and pierced his scarf; Mouy thrust in his turn, and a second time wounded him.

"He has it!" cried Henri, who had come up. "At him! at him, Mouy!"

Mouy needed no exhortation: he charged Maurevel again, who, pressing his hand over his wound, took to flight once more.

"Kill him quickly!" cried the king. "Here are his soldiers!"

Maurevel, breathless and exhausted, could go no farther; he fell on one knee, and presented his sword-point to Mouy.

"They are only two!" cried he. "Fire! fire!"

Saucourt and Barthélemy had been carried away in pursuit of the other soldiers, so that Mouy and the king found themselves opposed to four men.

"Fire!" cried Maurevel, while one of the soldiers prepared his arquebuse.

"Yes; but first," said Mouy, "die! assassin, murderer, traitor, die!"

So saying, Mouy seized Maurevel's sword with one hand, and plunged his own so violently into his breast that he pinned him to the earth.

"Take care! take care!" cried Henri.

Mouy sprang back, leaving his sword in the body of Maurevel, for a soldier was in the act of firing at him. Henri instantly passed his sword through the soldier's body, who fell, uttering a cry. The two others betook themselves to flight.

"Come, Mouy, come!" said Henri. "We have not a moment to lose; if we are recognized, we are lost!"

"One moment, Sire, while I recover my sword. You do not suppose I would leave it sticking in the body of that scoundrel!"

He went towards Maurevel, who lay, to all appearance, deprived of the power of motion; but the moment that Mouy laid his hand on the hilt of the sword which had remained in his body, he raised himself, with the petronel in his hand, which the soldier had dropped as he fell, and placing the muzzle full against Mouy's breast, pulled the trigger. Mouy fell without a cry; he was killed outright.

Henri rushed towards Maurevel; but he had fallen again, and the king's sword pierced only a dead carcass.

It was necessary for him to flee; the noise had attracted a great number of persons, and the guard might arrive. Henri then looked among the spectators drawn together by the noise, to see if any one was there whom he knew, and gave a cry of joy as he recognized Maître la Hurière.

"My dear La Hurière, look after Mouy, I pray you, although I have great fear that he is past hope. Have him taken to your house, and if he still lives, spare no expense; here is my purse. As to the other, leave the scoundrel to rot in the gutter like a dog!"

"But yourself?" said La Hurière.

"I have a farewell to make. I will hasten, and be back with you in ten minutes. Have my horses ready."

Henri then hastened away in the direction of the little house in the Croix des Petits Champs; but as he turned the corner, he stopped in great alarm.

There was a great crowd before the door.

"What has happened in this house?" inquired Henri.

"Oh," replied a bystander, "a terrible affair, Monsieur! A beautiful woman has been stabbed by her husband, to whom some one had sent a note, informing him that she was there with her lover."

"And the husband?" cried Henri.

"Has gone."

"The wife?"

"Is there still."

"Dead?"

"Not yet; but there is no hope."

"Oh," exclaimed Henri, "I am then accursed!" and he rushed into the house.

The room was filled with people, all surrounding the

bed on which lay poor Charlotte, stabbed with two blows of a poniard. Her husband, who had for two years concealed his jealousy of Henri, had seized this opportunity of avenging himself.

"Charlotte, Charlotte!" cried Henri, falling on his knees at the bedside.

Charlotte opened her beautiful eyes, already veiled by death, and gave a cry which made the blood flow from her two wounds; and making an effort to rise, she said, "Oh, I was sure I could not die without seeing him once more!"

And as if she had awaited the moment of Henri's coming to die, she pressed her lips on the King of Navarre's forehead, and murmuring for the last time, "I love thee!" fell back and expired.

Henri could not remain a moment longer without his life being in jeopardy. He drew his dagger, cut off one of those long and fair tresses he had so often admired and pressed to his lips, and sobbing bitterly, amid the sobs of the lookers-on, who had no idea that their sympathies were excited for persons of such high estate, left the room.

"Friend, mistress," cried Henri, in despair, "all forsake me, all leave me, all fail me at once."

"Yes, Sire," said a man who had quitted the group before the house, and followed Henri; "but the throne is still left to you."

"René!" cried Henri.

"Yes, Sire, René, who still watches over you. The wretch Maurevel named you as he died. They know you are in Paris; the archers are seeking for you. Fly! fly!"

"And yet you say, René, that I, a fugitive, shall be king?"

"Look, Sire," said the Florentine, pointing out to the king a star which appeared alone, brilliant among the folds of a golden cloud; "it is not I who say so, but *that!*"

Henri sighed and disappeared in the darkness.

THE END.

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